



JOINING HITLER'S **CRUSADE**

EUROPEAN NATIONS AND THE
INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION, 1941

EDITED BY **DAVID STAHEL**

Joining Hitler's Crusade

The reasons behind Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union are well known, but what about those of the other Axis and non-Axis powers that joined Operation Barbarossa? Six other European armies fought with the Wehrmacht in 1941 and six more countries sent volunteers, as well as there being countless collaborators in the east of various nationalities who were willing to work with the Germans in 1941. The political, social and military context behind why so many nations and groups of volunteers opted to join Hitler's war in the east reflects the many diverse, and largely unknown, roads that led to Operation Barbarossa. With each chapter dealing with a new country and every author being a subject matter expert on that nation, proficient in the local language and historiography, this fascinating new study offers unparalleled insight into non-German participation on the Eastern Front in 1941.

David Stahel is a Senior Lecturer in European history at the University of New South Wales in Canberra, Australia. His latest book, *The Battle for Moscow* (Cambridge, 2015), was shortlisted for the British Army's military book of the year, 2016.

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*European Nations and the Invasion of the
Soviet Union, 1941*

Edited by

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University of New South Wales, Canberra



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Preface

No other action impacted Germany's fate in the Second World War more directly than Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union. Indeed, given the enormous loss of life, the extraordinary destruction wrought and the sweeping political implications it engendered, the invasion of the Soviet Union remains one of the pivotal decisions of the twentieth century. The war in the east also led to Hitler's momentous attempt to mass murder all Soviet Jews, which paralleled the already ubiquitous criminality perpetrated by the SS and Wehrmacht against the occupied Slavic population and captured Red Army men. Thus, there can be no question that the decision to invade the Soviet Union reflected Hitler's ideological worldview about which so much has been written. By contrast, far less is known about why so many nations or individual volunteers opted to support Hitler's war in the east.

This book looks at the diverse countries, personalities and unique national circumstances that led to so many states to send men to fight against the Red Army in 1941. This is not the first book to address Germany's allies on the eastern front, but those that do are almost exclusively military histories with a focus on armies and campaigns and less the domestic politics, foreign policy pressures, prominent personalities and social conditions that led so many European nations and volunteers into war with Hitler. The 1976 study by Peter Gosztony, *Hitlers Fremde Heere: Das Schicksal der nichtdeutschen Armeen im Ostfeldzug*, and the more recent 2007 book by Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht: Hitlers ausländische Helfer beim 'Kreuzzug gegen den Bolschewismus'*,¹ are both cases in point. They also both deal with the whole period of foreign involvement in the war, which leaves very little discussion for *why* these nations took part in the first instance. A better guide is Kenneth Estes's 2015 book *A European Anabasis: Western European Volunteers in the German Army and SS, 1940–45*, which offers

¹ An English translation of this appeared in 2012. Rolf-Dieter Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers* (London, 2012).

a good mix of social and military history that is helpful in understanding the motivations of the volunteers. However, it too covers the whole period of the war in fewer than 200 pages and therefore lacks comprehensive discussion of 1941 (as well as excluding all the non-volunteer nations). Jonathan Adelman's 2007 edited collection *Hitler and his Allies in World War II* focuses on foreign relations with Nazi Germany, but again deals with much more than just Operation Barbarossa in 1941 and, with one exception, excludes the nations from which volunteers came.

There is some excellent discussion of Germany's allies and their motivation to participate in Operation Barbarossa by Jürgen Förster in the fourth volume of *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, but, apart from having been published over thirty years ago, it suffers from the inevitable problem that all who have attempted this subject confront. Archival and secondary literature for all of these nations require linguistic skills that no single author commands, which means that the little that has been written on this subject is restricted to the small base of largely German, French and English source material. The advantage of the present volume is that each author not only has the necessary linguistic skills, but is an established authority in the local debates and literature with extensive research experience in the field. The opportunity here is to offer a fresh perspective on Operation Barbarossa, one showcasing the beginning of the war from numerous new perspectives (beyond just German), while at the same introducing a good deal of previously unavailable material into the Anglo-American world.

Given the variety of national experiences under consideration, which varies from nations that sent a few hundred volunteers to those that sent hundreds of thousands, the variety of approaches to this question is wholly consistent with the wide spectrum, and complexity, of the contrasting paths to Barbarossa. Indeed, often the only common link among all the countries is the fact that they each had nationals fighting together on Germany's eastern front. While some nations made the decision to join the war at a state level (often with little concern for popular opinion), others only sent volunteers meaning the decisions rested with the individual and are therefore much more reflective of varied social, political and personal attitudes. Some of these nations were ruled by fascist governments, which, as in the case of Croatia or Romania, proved every bit as willing as the Nazis to employ violent coercion and mass murder. Other nations lived under a form of German military occupation or were ruled by collaborationist regimes, which by no means deterred local right-wing nationalists, and sometimes other groups, from supporting Hitler. Spain was nominally a neutral country, but accounted for the highest number of volunteers sent to the eastern front in 1941. Finland

was even a constitutional democracy, while Denmark retained its pre-war democratic government under German occupation, but both sent troops to fight in the east. Clearly, there was no prescriptive formula for the states involved in Operation Barbarossa and, as the essays in this study confirm, motivations within individual countries were often likewise splintered.

Only in the broadest sense can we then divide the nations under review and categorize them into general groups on the basis of their participation. The first six chapters of this book will focus on the nations which sent elements of their national army to take part in Operation Barbarossa. The next six chapters represent the occupied and neutral countries who sent volunteers to join the war and the last two chapters have been devoted to the diverse peoples inside the Soviet Union. These final two chapters are divided between the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which were only absorbed into the Soviet Union in 1940, and a separate chapter dealing with Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian and Cossack collaboration.

Acknowledgements

Since 2012 I have had the extraordinary good fortune of finding myself a part of the academic community at the University of New South Wales, Canberra with the best team of military historians in Australia – and none more so than Professor Jeffrey Grey. Serious students and scholars of military history will already know his unique contribution to the field; for others it is suffice to say he was a towering figure. His passing was sorely felt by all.

If there was one thing Jeff firmly advocated, even insisted upon, it was the virtue of academic exchange. In the past twenty-five years he hardly missed a meeting of the Society for Military History and he even became its first non-American president in 2015. Jeff attended countless other conferences around the world and edited or co-edited dozens of publications that brought scholars together on almost any topic related to military history. Not surprisingly, Jeff strongly encouraged me in the current project and it is therefore fitting that a collaborative work of new scholarship is dedicated to him.

Professor Jeffrey Grey (1959–2016)

Without question, my first debt of thanks for the completion of this book goes to its contributors. It was a pleasure working with a team who willingly met my every request and devoted so much of their time to its completion. I could not have asked for more.

A special note of thanks must also be extended to Oleg Beyda, who gladly took on small tasks and generally shared my passion for the project. To those who donated, located and suggested the many rare images reviewed, I also extend my gratitude. Lastly, to the production team at Cambridge University Press, my sincere thanks for all the hard work.

Introduction

David Stahel

From 1147 to 1149 Friedrich Barbarossa participated in the ill-fated Second Crusade serving under his uncle Conrad III (1093–1152). Forty years later, as Holy Roman Emperor, Friedrich called for a new Third Crusade to the Holy Lands, which he led in 1189.¹ His soldiers came from across the empire's vast European domain, which at that time spanned from Flanders to Moravia and from the Baltic Sea down into northern Italy. For his battlefield acumen, his political astuteness and his resolute determination, Friedrich was arguably the greatest of the Holy Roman Empire's medieval emperors. Accordingly, recruitment for what he referred to as his 'army of the Holy Cross'² was described by one contemporary as being led 'by his own example, he inspired all the young men to fight for Christ'.³ The result, especially for its time, was the raising of a truly enormous force. According to some accounts, Friedrich's army set out with 20,000 knights and 80,000 infantry, a force so large that it took three full days to pass any single point.⁴ Yet it was not simply the scale of Frederick's undertaking which captured the attention of the medieval world; the political realignment after decades of confrontation between his empire and the papacy was transformative. As Christopher Tyerman conspicuously points out in his pioneering history of the crusades, not only did this 'translate imperial claims into political authority within Germany, it also represented the consolidation of a new European order'.⁵ Tyerman's depiction of the ground-breaking

¹ Graham A. Loud, *The Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa: The History of the Expedition of the Emperor Frederick and Related Texts* (Farnham, 2010).

² Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), p. 421.

³ Edgar N. Johnson, 'The Crusades of Frederick Barbarossa and Henry IV' in Robert L. Wolff and Harry W. Hazard (eds.), *A History of the Crusades. Volume II. The Later Crusades, 1189–1311* (Madison, WI, 1969), p. 90.

⁴ Nor are these the largest estimates. Arnold of Lübeck's account from the early thirteenth century suggested Friedrich commanded 50,000 knights and 100,000 infantry. Christopher Tyerman, *God's War*, p. 418.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

political developments of 1189 might apply as equally to another crusading German leader 752 years into the future. Of course Adolf Hitler's proposed vision of a new European order was categorically different in many respects, but the demonization of his enemy and the unity of a Christian Europe against a 'godless' enemy were recurrent themes. Not surprisingly, therefore, Hitler sought to cast his war against Bolshevism as a modern-day European crusade modelled on Friedrich I's reputation and exploits. As the Nazi dictator explained to Mile Budak, the Croatian minister stationed in Berlin, the war against the Soviet Union 'is a crusade such as previously took place only against the Huns and against the Turks. This struggle must bring together and unite the European peoples.'⁶ Consequently, Hitler's codename for the military campaign to crush Bolshevism in the east was Operation 'Barbarossa'.

There is no question that Hitler's conception of foreign countries was built upon racist stereotypes and xenophobic clichés characteristic of the propaganda disseminated by the pan-German organizations and nationalistic press of the pre-First World War era.⁷ Yet even Germany in Hitler's conception was not framed by conventional geographical or constitutional definitions. Instead Hitler emphasized the German nation as a unique and distinct *Volk* defined by narrow ethnic and cultural characteristics. This allowed ethnic Germans, even those living in Russia since the eighteenth century, to be considered 'German' because of their supposed shared values, common language and 'blood'. By the 1920s the notion of the *Volk* became infused with pseudo-scientific writings linking it to biology, allowing the German to become a separate racial unit who was both of a common physical origin as well as culturally and spiritually superior.⁸ Emphasizing his view of different 'peoples', which was often employed as a synonym for nations, Hitler stated in his unpublished second book, dictated in 1928:

If we start from the premise that all peoples are not the same, then the peoples' intrinsic value is not the same either. [...] The effect of this particular value can be very different and can occur in very different areas, but together they provide a benchmark for the overall valuation of a people. The ultimate expression of this overall valuation is the historical cultural image of a people, in which the sum of all the rays of its genetic qualities – or the racial qualities united in it – are reflected.⁹

⁶ Jürgen Förster, 'Volunteers for the European Crusade against Bolshevism' in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War. Volume IV. The Attack on the Soviet Union* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 1050–1.

⁷ Percy Ernst Schramm, *Hitler: The Man and the Military Leader* (Chicago, 1999), p. 52.

⁸ Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (London, 2004), p. 549.

⁹ Gerhard Weinberg (ed.), *Hitler's Second Book* (New York, 2003), p. 32.

In Hitler's conception the state was less an administrative institution than an organism of the people's will, which needed to be strong, even ruthless, in order to protect itself against competing and predatory outsiders. There could be no private sphere of individual rights because the *Volk* had to be safeguarded through the absolute authority of the state. Accordingly, the state was justified to make almost any intervention in the lives of the *Volksgenosse* (a member of the *Volk*) to ensure survival and dominance.¹⁰ 'The higher the racial worth of a people', Hitler's second book explained, 'the greater overall value, which, in conflict and in the struggle with other peoples, it must then mobilize for the benefit of its life'.¹¹

As Richard Overy has observed, nations, in Hitler's view, were therefore coterminous with race and can be broadly divided into two categories. The first being 'higher nations', which were dedicated to self-preservation and exhibited superior culture as evidence of their racial pre-eminence. The second category was 'lower nations' which were contrastingly degenerate and marked by cultural sterility and biological inferiority. Importantly, the survival of nations was seen to be analogous to survival in nature, with the weaker being subjugated by the stronger, resulting in either cultural assimilation or physical annihilation. Under National Socialism non-Germans were, by definition, incapable of being or becoming full members of Hitler's racial state as they represented an impurity indicative, in the most extreme case, of the maligning influence of the parasitic Jew, which threatened all higher culture.¹² Such a danger existed when there was any kind of departure from, or diluting of, one's own culture. As Hitler explained:

The mixing of blood and the decline of the race are, then, the results that in the beginning are not infrequently introduced by a so-called *Ausländerei* [love for foreign things] – in reality an under-appreciation of one's own cultural value in comparison to that of foreign peoples. As soon as a people no longer values the genetically conditioned cultural expression of the life of its own soul, or even begins to be ashamed of it and turns to foreign ways of life, it renounces the power that lies in the harmony of its blood and the cultural life that springs from it. ... Then the Jew can move in, in every form, and this master of international poison concoction and racial debasement will not rest until he has completely uprooted and thereby corrupted such a people.¹³

¹⁰ Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York, 1972), p. 14.

¹¹ Gerhard Weinberg (ed.), *Hitler's Second Book*, pp. 32–3.

¹² Richard Overy, *The Dictators*, pp. 552–3.

¹³ Gerhard Weinberg (ed.), *Hitler's Second Book*, p. 33.

Such a dire pronouncement forms an important intellectual context in understanding Hitler's conception of both his enemies as well as his allies. Indeed, distinguishing between the two was sometimes complicated by the eternal struggle between the nations that Hitler envisioned. Higher nations, typically identified by a supposed 'Nordic' culture and racial characteristics, were cautiously accepted as armed allies, while others, despite their common cause, goodwill and willingness to serve Nazi goals, were rejected as members of lower, degenerate nations. Nevertheless, as the Wehrmacht advanced in the east, incorporating millions of people into the German zone of occupation, Hitler's troops were frequently greeted as liberators.¹⁴ Older people contrasted their recent experience of Soviet tyranny with the affirmative, if distant, memory of a generally benevolent German occupation dating from the First World War.¹⁵ The suggestion has even been made that the black crosses adorning the vehicles of the German army (the *Balkenkreuz*) were interpreted by peasants as a sign of Christian liberation from Soviet atheism.¹⁶ Not only did some formations of the Red Army willingly surrender in the summer of 1941, but it was not uncommon that the soldiers requested to be rearmed to join the war against Stalin, communism or 'the Jews'. Hitler, however, would have none of it and commented emphatically:

No one but a German shall ever be allowed to bear arms! This is of the utmost importance; even if it may seem easier at first to mobilize the military support of some foreign subject peoples, it is wrong! Because one day it will backfire, absolutely and inevitably. Only the German may bear arms, not the Slav, not the Czech, not the Ukrainian!¹⁷

Whatever Hitler's long-term aversion to arming his subjected peoples in the east, the fact remains that in the opening weeks of Operation Barbarossa the Nazi leadership, as well as the army command, did not believe that the Wehrmacht was in need of such support. Thus, those who have admonished Nazi Germany's rejection of the

¹⁴ According to German command reports and intelligence estimates, around 90 per cent of the Ukrainian population exhibited a friendly disposition. Alex Alexiev, 'Soviet Nationals in German Wartime Service, 1941–1945' in Antonio Munoz (ed.), *Soviet Nationals in German Wartime Service 1941–1945* (2007), p. 13.

¹⁵ Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 20–1.

¹⁶ Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova (eds.), *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945* (New York, 2005), p. 38.

¹⁷ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht: Hitlers ausländische Helfer beim 'Kreuzzug gegen den Bolschewismus' 1941–1945* (Berlin, 2007), p. 14; Gerd R. Ueberschär and Wolfram Wette (eds.), *'Unternehmen Barbarossa' Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941* (Paderborn 1984), p. 331.

disaffected non-Russian minorities,¹⁸ fail to understand Germany's own *Weltanschauung* (worldview) from which it cannot be separated. Much less than a lost opportunity, the denial of arms was simply irreconcilable with Nazi plans for the east. On 20 June 1941 Alfred Rosenberg, who would shortly become Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, told his colleagues that Germany was not waging a 'crusade' against Bolshevism in order to save 'the poor Russian', but 'to pursue German world policy and to safeguard the German Reich'.¹⁹

Even if one sets aside the ahistorical nature of the debate and seeks to explore the strictly military implications of arming the anti-Soviet contingents, the fact remains that little could probably have been expected. This is not to doubt the ability, resolve or size of the disaffected groups, but rather a commentary on the weakness of Germany's economic base. At over 3 million men the German *Ostheer* (eastern army) was already a patchwork force fielding equipment seized from all over Europe and still suffering notable shortages. Mobilizing hundreds of thousands, even millions, of additional 'eastern troops' therefore raises the question of how they would have been armed, equipped and supplied. A certain number could have been equipped from captured Soviet equipment (as those contingents raised in 1941 were), but sustaining them in the numbers required to make a difference on the eastern front would have posed numerous and unresolved problems.²⁰

While Germany's propaganda surrounding the 'crusade against Bolshevism' was certainly intended to generate political support for the war in the east, it was only the SS who had previously been active in recruiting foreigners for volunteer formations.²¹ The German Foreign Office and the Wehrmacht were both caught unprepared for the political, legal and administrative issues that foreign volunteers joining the war constituted. A hurried meeting was organized for 30 June 1941 between representatives of the Foreign Office, the Wehrmacht High Command,

¹⁸ See for example: Heinz Magenheimer, *Hitler's War: Germany's Key Strategic Decisions 1940–1945* (London, 1999), p. 116.

¹⁹ As cited in: Jürgen Förster, 'Volunteers for the European Crusade against Bolshevism', p. 1050.

²⁰ David Stahel, *Kiev 1941: Hitler's Battle for Supremacy in the East* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 82–3.

²¹ See the unpublished PhD by Mark Philip Gingerich, *Towards a Brotherhood of Arms: Waffen-SS Recruitment of Germanic Volunteers 1940–1945* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991); Adrian Weale, *Army of Evil: A History of the SS* (New York, 2012) Chapter 19: Making up the Numbers: Foreign Volunteers and Criminals in the Waffen-SS; George H. Stein, *The Waffen SS – Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939–1945* (New York, 1984), pp. 121–7.

the SS main office and the NSDAP, which led to the 'Guidelines for the employment of foreign volunteers in the struggle against the Soviet Union'. These guidelines reflected the strict ideological nature of Germany's engagement with foreign citizens, even if they were willing to fight for them. Volunteers were divided into two groups, 'Germanic' and 'non-Germanic', with the former – designated as Danes, Finns, Flemings, Dutchmen, Norwegians and Swedes – to be incorporated into the Waffen-SS. The latter group, consisting of French, Croats, Spaniards and Walloons, were directed to fight in the Wehrmacht.²² All Czech and Russian émigré volunteers were to be rejected.²³

In total, some 29,248 'non-Germanic' volunteers had entered service with the Wehrmacht by January 1942, the great majority being Spanish (18,372), but the next largest category being Soviet citizens (4,250)²⁴ – explicitly against Hitler's instruction. This reflects the disconnect, already apparent in 1941, between the demands for manpower in the east and the extent to which local German commanders were prepared to turn a blind eye or even actively subvert official regulations.²⁵ After the Spaniards and Soviets, the Wehrmacht received 3,795 Croats, 1,971 French and 860 Belgian Walloons. In addition, there were some 12,000 'Germanic volunteers of non-German nationality' who had entered service with the Waffen-SS by the end of 1941. These included some 4,814 Dutchmen, 2,399 Danes, 1,883 Norwegians, 1,240 Flemings, 1,180 Finns, 135 Swiss and Liechtensteiners and 39 Swedes.²⁶ Significantly, the Waffen-SS also gained another 6,200 'ethnic Germans' from around Europe with the majority coming from Romania (2,500) and Serbia and Croatia (2,200), but smaller contingents from Slovakia, Hungary, Luxembourg,

²² Jürgen Förster, 'Volunteers for the European Crusade against Bolshevism', pp. 1051–2.

²³ In fact volunteer Russian émigrés did manage to serve in the east. See: Oleg Beyda, 'Iron Cross of the Wrangel's Army: Russian Emigrants as Interpreters in the Wehrmacht' in *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (3) (2014), pp. 430–48; Oleg Beyda, 'A Different Russian Perspective or 'Their Long Defeat': White émigrés and the Second World War' in Tristan Moss and Tom Richardson (eds.), *New Directions in War and History* (Newport, Australia, 2016), pp. 72–87.

²⁴ Given the official restrictions and the tendency of under-reporting or no reporting at all, this figure is almost certainly far from the real number.

²⁵ The fact that anti-Soviet contingents were raised in 1941 in spite of official prohibitions demonstrates Jeff Rutherford's thesis about prevalence of 'military necessity' over simple ideology. See: Jeff Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front: The German Infantry's War, 1941–1944* (Cambridge, 2014).

²⁶ On Western European volunteers generally see: Kenneth Estes, *A European Anabasis: Western European Volunteers in the German Army and SS, 1940–45* (Solihull, 2015); Martin Gutmann, 'Debunking the Myth of the Volunteers: Transnational Volunteering in the Nazi Waffen-SS Officer Corps during the Second World War' in *Contemporary European History* 22 (4) (November, 2013), pp. 585–607.

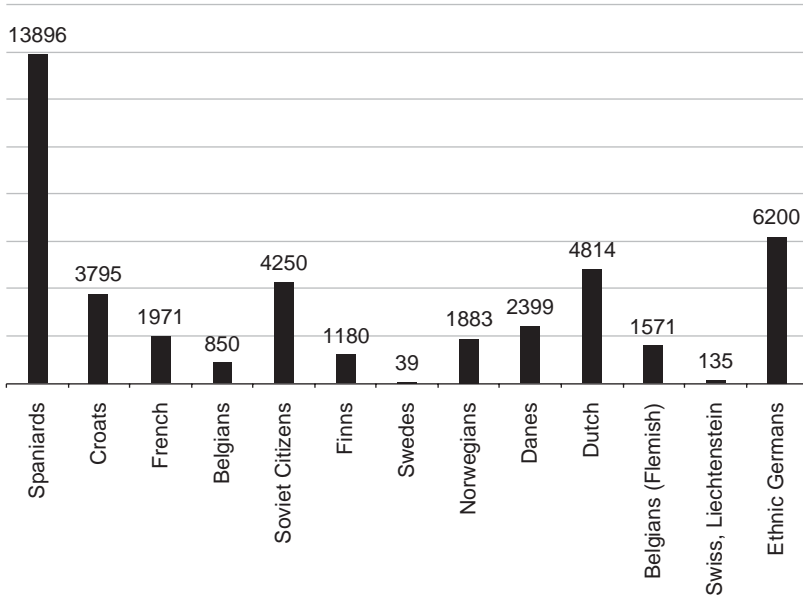


Figure 0.1 Foreigners and Ethnic Germans in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS (January 1942).

Alsace and Lorraine.²⁷ Overall, some 47,000 volunteers of both the ‘Germanic’ and ‘non-Germanic’ classification had volunteered to fight with the Wehrmacht or the Waffen-SS by the beginning of 1942.²⁸

While the mix of foreign volunteers gave political credence to German propaganda about a European ‘crusade’ against Bolshevism, in practical terms they meant far less given the scale of fighting on the eastern front. The overwhelming bulk of foreign military support for the Wehrmacht came from the national armies of Finland and Romania with further noteworthy contingents provided by Italy, Hungary and Slovakia. Yet even

²⁷ On ethnic Germans generally see: Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993).

²⁸ Figures adapted from Bernhard R. Kroener, ‘The Winter Crisis of 1941–1942: The Distribution of Scarcity or Steps Towards a More Rational Management of Personnel’ in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War. Volume V/I. Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 1027–8.

these nations, four of which were signatories of the Tripartite Pact, were held at arm's length. Only the Finns and the Romanians were brought into the military planning for Operation Barbarossa and that was mainly to ensure essential staging areas for German troops or to safeguard strategic assets against anticipated Soviet counterattacks. Even the racially acceptable Finns, imbued with 'Nordic culture' and an open loathing of Stalin's state, were denied precise information about the timing of the invasion, National Socialist war aims and, on Hitler's explicit instruction, any operational details not deemed absolutely necessary for successful local co-operation.²⁹ This was in spite of the fact that Finland mobilized a greater proportion of its small population than any of the other combatants, including Germany (476,000 men from 3.7 million inhabitants).³⁰ Moreover, Finland allowed over 30,000 German troops to concentrate on its territory as well as permitting the Wehrmacht to administer some 100,000 square kilometres of northern Finland.³¹ It is not surprising that Finland's leadership was reticent about any formal alliance with Nazi Germany and preferred the term *Waffenbrüderschaft* (brothers-in-arms).³² Indeed, only the day before Barbarossa began Finnish President Risto Ryri stated to a parliamentary delegation: 'Germany is the only state today that can defeat Russia, or at least considerably weaken it. Nor would it probably be any loss to the world if Germany were to be weakened in the fray.'³³ Given both their common enemy and shared expansionist goals (a 'Greater Finland' was based on the slogan 'Short Borders – Long Peace'³⁴), the mutual suspicion and distrust was to prove an ominous starting point for what Finland's commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, called the 'holy war against the enemy of our people'.³⁵

²⁹ Gerd R. Ueberschär, 'The Involvement of Scandinavia in the Plans for Barbarossa' in *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt* (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War. Volume IV: The Attack on the Soviet Union* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 461–2.

³⁰ By no means did all of the men mobilized in Finland serve at the front. In total there were sixteen Finnish divisions with some 200,000 front-line troops. See *ibid.*, p. 463.

³¹ Manfred Menger, 'Germany and the Finnish "Separate War" against the Soviet Union' in Bernd Wegner (ed.), *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939–1941* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 529 and 533.

³² See the excellent discussion in: Michael Jonas, 'The Politics of an Alliance Finland in Nazi Foreign Policy and War Strategy' in Tiina Kinnunen and Ville Kivimäki (eds.), *Finland in World War II: History, Memory, Interpretations* (Boston, 2012), pp. 117–18.

³³ Olli Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War: Between Germany and Russia* (New York, 2002), p. 89.

³⁴ Manfred Menger, 'Germany and the Finnish "Separate War" against the Soviet Union', p. 532.

³⁵ Vesa Nenye, Peter Munter, Toni Wirtanen and Chris Birks, *Finland at War: the Continuation and Lapland Wars 1941–45* (Oxford, 2016), p. 49.

Romania, under General Ion Antonescu, was ideologically far closer to Nazi Germany and shared Hitler's conception of the war in the east not only as a necessary conventional struggle against Soviet power, but as a reckoning with 'the Jews' who Antonescu referred to as 'Satan' in need of 'purification'.³⁶ Of course, Romania also shared Finland's bitter territorial grievances resulting from recent Soviet aggression and was prepared to commit its own 'Army Group Antonescu', consisting of the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies with some 325,685 men, to Operation Barbarossa.³⁷ Nominally Antonescu's army group was also given command of the German Eleventh Army, under Colonel-General Eugen Ritter von Schobert, but this was only for appearances as Hitler explained to his Romanian counterpart that 'he intended to let him appear before the Romanian people as the supreme commander in this region'. In practice, however, Schobert was in charge of the army group's operations, while Hitler reserved the right to issue instructions through Antonescu 'which referred to the Romanian Army'.³⁸ Indeed, while Hitler respected Antonescu for his strict, authoritarian rule as well as his fervent anti-communism and anti-Semitism, this did not redress his disdain for the 'lower nation' that he led. Speaking informally to his inner circle, Hitler remarked: 'Antonescu is of Germanic origin, not Romanian; he's a born soldier. His misfortune is to have Romanians under his command'.³⁹ Clearly, even Hitler's most enthusiastic and committed allies could still be dismissed as 'foreign' in spite of their willingness to sacrifice and fight in what the Vice-President, Mihai Antonescu, declared to be Romania's 'great holy war' against the Soviet Union.⁴⁰

While Finland and Romania played by far the largest roles in Operation Barbarossa, Italy under Benito Mussolini was personally Hitler's closest ally. Yet contravening the very essence of the German-Italian Pact of Steel (May 1939), Mussolini was only informed about the start of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941⁴¹ (although Italian military intelligence

³⁶ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania 1940–1944* (London, 2006), pp. 116–17. On Romania's role in the Holocaust see: Dennis Deletant, 'Transnistria and the Romanian Solution to the "Jewish Problem"' in Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (eds.), *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington, 2008), Chapter 4.

³⁷ Mark Axworthy, Cornel Scafes and Cristian Craciunoiu, *Third Axis Fourth Ally: Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941–1945* (London, 1995), p. 45.

³⁸ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, p. 80.

³⁹ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941–1944: His Private Conversations* (London, 2000), p. 49.

⁴⁰ Dennis Deletant, 'German-Romanian Relations, 1941–1945' in Jonathan Adelman (ed.), *Hitler and his Allies in World War II* (New York, 2007), p. 176.

⁴¹ Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (New York, 2002), p. 378, see footnote 181.

had concrete evidence of the impending attack by mid-May 1941).⁴² Japan was similarly left uninformed, which again exposed the hollowness of the Berlin-Tokyo-Rome Axis as well as Hitler's determination to make sweeping strategic decisions independently of his allies. Apart from a prudent desire to keep Italy's already overburdened armed forces off the eastern front, Hitler's active deception vis-à-vis Mussolini was encouraged by the low estimation he placed on Italian troops whom he disparagingly referred to as mere 'harvest hands'. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest Hitler saw his alliance with the 'Latin race' as a simple political convenience and that he would dispense with Italy after the victory over the Soviet Union.⁴³ Echoing the dysfunction of the German alliance system, Mussolini commented to his foreign minister shortly after Barbarossa began: 'I hope for only one thing, that in this war in the east the Germans will lose a lot of feathers.'⁴⁴ Publicly, of course, the Italian press spoke only of a united 'anti-Bolshevik crusade'.⁴⁵

Hitler's private scorn for his non-Nordic allies extended most particularly to the Hungarians where he followed the familiar pattern of praising the nation's pro-Axis leader, Admiral Miklós Horthy, while denigrating the 'racial stock' of his people. On two occasions in 1941 Hitler gave voice to his loathing for Hungarians, commenting first that they were 'as lazy as the Russian' and that even National Socialism could not rectify this.⁴⁶ On another occasion, Hitler referred to them as the most maligned of his allies: 'From a social point of view, the sickest communities of the New Europe are: first, Hungary, then Italy.'⁴⁷ Both of Hitler's comments came after Hungary had opted to support Operation Barbarossa with 45,000 men and in absence of any formal German request for assistance (although they certainly had a political agenda vis-à-vis Germany). Moreover, the Hungarian 'Mobile Corps' proved a highly valued element of the 1st Panzer Group and it was actually in better shape by early September 1941 than the other German mobile formations.⁴⁸ Evidence of Hungarian collaboration in the violent excesses of Nazi policy in the

⁴² MacGregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime, and the War of 1940–1943* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 76.

⁴³ Jürgen Förster, 'The Decisions of the Tripartite Pact States' in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War. Volume IV. The Attack on the Soviet Union* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 1037 and 1039. See also: Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London, 2008), pp. 115 and 321–3.

⁴⁴ Malcolm Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Diary 1939–1943* (London, 1947), p. 365 (1 July 1941). See also comments on p. 354 (6 June 1941).

⁴⁵ Jürgen Förster, 'The Decisions of the Tripartite Pact States', p. 1039.

⁴⁶ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941–1944*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴⁸ Jürgen Förster, 'The Decisions of the Tripartite Pact States', p. 1031.

east, including the Holocaust,⁴⁹ paralleled complicity in the military campaign, making Horthy's call for a 'crusade for the elimination of the communist menace' a literal as well as a figurative declaration.⁵⁰

Gaining autonomy in 1939, the independent state of Slovakia owed its existence to Germany and therefore exercised only a very limited degree of sovereignty.⁵¹ Exemplifying this, the German envoy to Bratislava, Hans Bernard, stated in 1940 that 'the time has come to make it clear that Slovakia lays in our *Lebensraum*, that is, that only our wishes matter'.⁵² Understanding this, Slovakia's fascist leader, Jozef Tiso, did all in his power to appease Hitler, although the decision to participate in Operation Barbarossa was depicted not as a war against 'the great Russian people or Slavdom', but rather as part of a 'Christian, national program' against the 'mortal danger' of Bolshevism.⁵³

Together Germany's allies in 1941 mobilized well over 700,000 troops for the war against the Soviet Union, but in spite of their propaganda surrounding a common 'crusade' against Bolshevism, in most cases this was only an opportune by-product of their participation and not the main motive for entering war. Since the Second Vienna Award in the summer of 1940, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia had been mutually hostile allies each vying for Hitler's backing either to protect gains made in the arbitration (Hungary) or redress losses (Romania and Slovakia).⁵⁴ The embitterment was such that none of these countries could be employed alongside each other on the eastern front for fear of open conflict between them. Finland too was far more pragmatic in its war aims as it sought, at a minimum, to regain the ground it had been forced to cede in the Winter War (1939–40). Croatia, which dispatched some 3,795 volunteers to the eastern front in 1941, was likewise motivated more by a desire to strengthen the country's negotiating position with Germany against hegemonic Italian influence than the official call for recruits to engage in a 'holy struggle against the brutish Bolshevik

⁴⁹ Wendy Lower, 'Axis Collaboration, Operation Barbarossa, and the Holocaust in Ukraine' in Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford and David Stahel (eds.), *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide and Radicalization* (Suffolk, UK, 2012), pp. 192–9.

⁵⁰ Jürgen Förster, 'The Decisions of the Tripartite Pact States', p. 1028.

⁵¹ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht*, p. 100.

⁵² James Mace Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (New York, 2013), p. 211.

⁵³ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht*, pp. 100–1. For Slovakia's campaign in the Soviet Union see: Mark Axworthy, *Axis Slovakia: Hitler's Slavic Wedge 1938–1945* (New York, 2002).

⁵⁴ Jürgen Förster, 'Germany's Acquisition of Allies in South-East Europe' in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War. Volume IV: The Attack on the Soviet Union* (Oxford, 1998), p. 428.

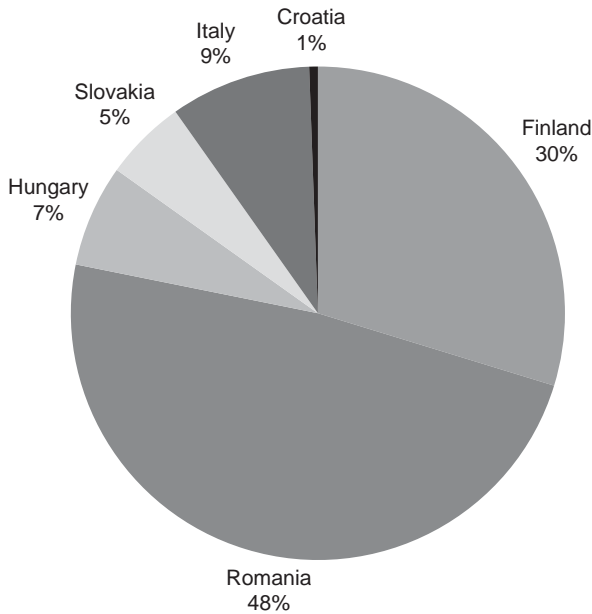


Figure 0.2 Non-German National Armies in the East, 1941.

scourge'.⁵⁵ By contrast, the ideological goal of destroying Bolshevism was really only front and centre for Mussolini who, in addition to his desire for prestige, was much less focused on tangible outcomes in the east.

As the individual cases demonstrate, Hitler's engagement with his allies was based on a nihilistic foreign policy determined by race, German war aims and National Socialist ideology. The identification of 'lower nations' in Hitler's worldview, to which most of his allies belonged, and the absolute supremacy of German interests, made the conduct of coalition warfare utterly one-sided and, accordingly, dysfunctional.⁵⁶ Such a conclusion is also reflected by the different national experiences of volunteers for the eastern front, which were typically subject to Germany's

⁵⁵ Amir Obhodaš and Jason D. Marks, *Croatian Legion: The 269th Reinforced (Croatian) Infantry Regiment on the Eastern Front 1941–1943* (Sydney, 2010), pp. 3–6; Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht*, pp. 106–7.

⁵⁶ Richard L. DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers: From Coalition to Collapse* (Lawrence, KS, 2005), Chapter 5: Barbarossa.

degrading treatment and broken promises, including by ‘Germanic’ men who emanated from ‘higher’ cultured nations. Indeed, National Socialism equated compromise or concessions to weakness and vulnerability, which forestalled empathy for foreign concerns and precluded genuine engagement with outsiders. Every foreign dealing was about ensuring Hitler’s own agenda, which is why there was never a multilateral Axis conference to explore common ground or decide strategy. Hitler’s position was always strongest in a bilateral setting, which allowed him to bring to bear all his talents for persuasion and intimidation, while playing his allies off against each other just as he did the rival personalities within his own government. Here Hitler’s diplomatic myopia mimicked the military with bilateral war planning substituting for any common Axis command staff to best coordinate scant resources. Consequently, when Hitler informed Croatia’s War Minister, Slavko Kvaternik, in July 1941 that ‘the struggle against Bolshevism has united all of Europe’,⁵⁷ it was a unity built upon the flimsiest of foundations. Even before the end of the year the mistaken calculus of quick victory, limited liability and political dividend produced ruptures in Hitler’s alliance network. Finland, Hungary and Slovakia all sought to moderate their exposure to the war,⁵⁸ while varying percentages of volunteers from every contributing nation were reconsidering their commitment. Contrastingly, Romania and Italy doubled-down on their commitment, promising even more resources. In Antonescu’s case, however, there was a pragmatic recognition that applied to all the Axis nations of south-eastern Europe; there could be no alternative to a German victory against the Soviet Union and, accordingly, their fate was inextricably bound to Hitler’s.

Hitler’s decision to parallel his own war in the east with Friedrich Barbarossa’s Third Crusade might well have made for more symbolism than was intended or desired. Friedrich’s unexpected death before he reached the Holy Lands (he drowned when he fell from his horse while fording the Saleph River) might be compared to Operation Barbarossa’s own failure in the summer of 1941.⁵⁹ Moreover, while the Christian

⁵⁷ Norman J. W. Goda, ‘The Diplomacy of the Axis, 1940–1945’ in Ricard J. B. Bosworth and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume II: Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 286.

⁵⁸ See my discussion in: David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany’s Defeat in the East* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 358–9.

⁵⁹ For more on the failure of Operation Barbarossa in the summer of 1941 see: *ibid*; David Stahel, *Kiev 1941: Hitler’s Battle for Supremacy in the East* (Cambridge, 2012); David M. Glantz, *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle for Smolensk 10 July – 10 September 1941: Volumes 1–4* (Solihull, UK, 2010–15); Craig W. H. Luther, *Barbarossa Unleashed: The German Blitzkrieg through Central Russia to the Gates of Moscow June–December 1941* (Atglen, PN, 2013).

crusaders later rallied for a Fourth Crusade (1202–4), this also failed to reach the Holy Lands, just as Hitler's second attempt to eliminate the Soviet resistance in 1941 (Operation Typhoon) would again fall short of its lofty expectations. In conceiving of his crusade against Bolshevism, Hitler's choice of symbolism was therefore ill-conceived, but given the ultimate outcome, altogether appropriate.

Those who joined Hitler's 1941 'crusade' to the east did so for their own varied reasons, which were almost invariably dispelled once the demands of the war, and in many instances Hitler himself, forced hard choices. What this volume offers, in addition to any specific accounts of involvement, is a reminder that the eastern front of the Second World War was in fact an international war dominated by German and Russian forces. This study discusses eighteen separate European countries (on today's map) that fought at the side of Nazi Germany, and in a post-Soviet world one might equally add that fourteen separate European and Asian states contributed in varying degrees to Russia's war effort. Yet the international character of the war often does not come through the grand narrative accounts of the eastern front; in fact, the contribution of Hitler's allies is typically left to the margins. In part, this is a justifiable response to Germany's dominance in matters of occupation policy, military operations and strategy, but most accounts can be faulted for failing to take adequate account of the size of these forces, their significance to individual campaigns and the political legitimacy they lent to Nazi Germany's war. Understanding why so many of Hitler's allies became involved on the eastern front is therefore not an interesting insight into the exception, but rather a fundamental and neglected part of the war itself.

Part I

The National Armies

1 Finland

Henrik Meinander

On the evening of 26 June 1941, Finns gathered around their radio receivers to listen to a speech by their President Risto Ryti. His message was dramatic but predictable: Finland, a sparsely populated but territorially large Scandinavian democracy on the northeastern shores of the Baltic Sea, had once again stumbled into a war with its mighty neighbor to the East. Since the launching of Operation Barbarossa four days earlier, the Soviet air force had bombed Finnish coastal defences. During the following days airfields and large towns also became the targets of air attacks, prompting the Finnish parliament, on the afternoon of 25 June, to give its unanimous backing to a government statement declaring a state of war.

This was the second time in one and a half years that the two countries had come into conflict. The first clash took place in the winter of 1939–40, when as a consequence of the secret demarcation line agreed in the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, Finland fought a three-month war against the Soviet Union. The Finns managed to ward off an occupation, but were forced to sign a peace treaty ceding substantial border territories close to Leningrad. After this, Moscow gradually increased its pressure on Finland to fulfill the terms of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, and to act as the same kind of buffer zone for the USSR as the Baltic States and eastern Poland.

In his radio speech, President Ryti characterized these measures as nothing less than an attempt to destroy Finnish sovereignty, thus accusing the Soviet Union of being solely responsible for the new confrontation. Not a word was mentioned of Finland's far-reaching military preparations, that in collaboration with Germany had been carried out secretly since January 1941 in order to prepare the Finnish army for a war of revenge. Nevertheless, it was clear to Ryti's audience that the sub-text of his speech was retaliation. Since Finland would now fight side-by-side with the Greater German Reich, its chances of surviving this 'second defensive struggle' were greatly improved compared to the Winter War

of 1939–40. This time, the Soviet Union would face an equally strong enemy, and according to Ryti, it was self-evident that there would be ‘a successful outcome to our own war of defense’.¹

The outcome, of course, was not self-evident, and nor would the war be successful. Why, then, did a parliamentary democracy such as Finland agree so readily to participate in Operation Barbarossa? The short answer is that the harsh experience of the Winter War had convinced both the political elite and the population at large of the urgent need to create a strong deterrent against the Soviet Union’s plans to incorporate Finland into its buffer zone. To provide a more complete answer, we will focus first on geopolitical developments in Northern Europe during the period leading up to 1939, asking why Finland was included in the Soviet security zone established by the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. We will then seek to determine how a mutual understanding arose between the German and Finnish governments during the winter of 1940–41, and will examine the manner in which this was received by Finnish citizens and the country’s parliament. Finally, an analysis will be made of how thorough and systematic the Finnish-German war preparations were in the weeks and months before the battle cries of Operation Barbarossa resounded across Europe.

Defined by Geography

A swift glance at the geographical position of Finland is enough to explain why its destiny has been so dependent on relations between the great powers surrounding the Baltic Sea. Until the nineteenth century Finland was an integral part of the Swedish kingdom; due to its location it was repeatedly the battleground in wars between Sweden and the expanding Russian Empire. In 1808–9 Russia occupied Finland for the third time within a century and forcibly annexed the region to its empire as an autonomous Grand Duchy, permitted to maintain its Swedish legislation and Lutheran faith.²

In other words, Finland remained a Nordic society, developing gradually into a state within a state before finally severing its ties with Russia during the revolution of 1917. But even as Finland declared its independence, support for a comparable revolution grew, and in the spring

¹ *Helsingin Sanomat*, 27 June 1941; <http://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2006/09/08/presidentti-rytin-puhe-jatkosodan-alussa> (last accessed 4 January 2016).

² Henrik Meinander, ‘On the Brink or In-between? The Conception of Europe in Finnish identity’, in Mikael af Malmberg and Bo Stråth (eds.), *The Meaning of Europe: Variety and Contention within and among Nations* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 149–54; Henrik Meinander, *A History of Finland* (London: Hurst, 2011), 15–66.

of 1918 the Finns fought a three-month war against one another. The Reds received weapons from the Bolsheviks, but the Whites were victorious due to a decisive intervention by German forces who remained in the country until the capitulation of their homeland at the end of the Great War in November 1918. During this brief period Finnish defence, economic and political interests were so strongly subordinated to those of Berlin that the country was swiftly being transformed into a German vassal state. Following Germany's defeat, the Finnish government was obliged to perform a hasty U-turn in order to convince the victorious Western powers that Finland could be trusted as an independent state, a parliamentary democracy and a trade partner.³

This urgent need for Western recognition was one reason why Finland in the summer of 1919 adopted a republican constitution with strong democratic institutions and guarantees of civil rights. Similar liberal constitutions were implemented in most of the new states that were born from the collapse of the four European empires, but during the interwar period most of these reverted to more autocratic power structures. The only exceptions were Czechoslovakia and Finland, but the democratic order of these countries was also challenged at times by radicals on the right and left.⁴

In Finland, communist activities were considered the strongest threat to parliamentary democracy and national sovereignty. Finland signed a peace treaty with the Soviet government in 1920, but relations between the two countries remained strained. While the mutual distrust had its roots in earlier epochs, it was further nurtured by bitter memories from the revolution in 1917–18, thus thwarting any hopes of improved ties. Moscow systematically supported the Finnish communists' challenge to the societal order, at the same time as the Finnish Civil Guards were very outspoken in their anti-communist slogans. Between 1930 and 1932 this ideological clash led to a right-wing protest movement that culminated in an abortive coup d'état.⁵

One outcome of this crisis was a total prohibition of communist activities. Another was a growing readiness to defend the country's democratic institutions, which resulted in moderate political forces emulating the Scandinavian example and forming, for the first time, a Centre-Left

³ Risto Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Juha Siltala, 'Being absorbed into an Unintended War', in Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius (eds.), *The Finnish Civil Wars 1918: History, Memory, Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 51–89.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), pp. 109–41; Meinander, *A History of Finland*, pp. 131–46.

⁵ Juha Siltala, *Lapuan liike ja kyyditykset 1930* (Helsinki: Otava, 1985).

coalition in 1937. This alliance also clearly represented a defensive reaction to the harsher atmosphere in European security policy. Hitler's consolidation of power and the Soviet military build-up spurred Finnish attempts to establish a Finno-Swedish defence pact that could deter the Soviet Union. In the end, however, Sweden proved unwilling to jeopardize its policy of neutrality for Finland's sake.⁶

Despite this setback, Finland retained close ties to Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries. Due to Finland's long history of Swedish rule, its civil society and public life followed the same legislative tradition and societal values as in the other Scandinavian countries. One-tenth of the population was Swedish-speaking, and a substantial proportion of the societal elite was bilingual. The democratic reforms implemented in Finland (in 1906, 1918 and 1919) were thus buttressed by a political culture that was more tolerant of different opinions and ideologies than those in the other fledgling states between Russia and Germany. True, Finland had been dragged into a revolution in 1917–18, and experienced radical-right unrest in the early 1930s, but in both cases the discord was predominantly a reaction to European geopolitics. Furthermore, the conflicts in both cases ended with the election of democratic parliaments.

Another driving force of Finnish democracy was, of course, the considerable economic growth that took place during the interwar period, and that paved the way for political compromises and social reforms. But the more the geopolitical tension in Europe increased, the less these domestic gains could prevent Finland from being utilized in the cynical power struggle between Germany and the Soviet Union. Finland's parliamentary democracy was unable to react in time and handle effectively the insistent pressure from the Soviet Union after the Polish campaign in September 1939. That said, the Finnish government was at least more resolute than those of the three Baltic States, which were much less dependent on popular opinion and so quickly acceded to the Soviet Union's demand for military bases in order to avoid war in the short run. Once the Red Army had gained these footholds, however, it was then easy to complete the annexation of the three states to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940.⁷

In stark contrast to the Baltic complaisance, Finnish opposition remained undaunted throughout similar negotiations with Moscow in

⁶ Timo Soikkanen, *Kansallinen eheytyminen – myytti vai todellisuus: Ulko- ja sisäpolitiikan linjat ja vuorovaikutus 1933–1939*, Turku, 1983; Wilhelm Agrell, *Fred och fruktan: Sveriges säkerhetspolitiska historia 1918–2000* (Lund, Sweden: Historiska Media, 2000), pp. 45–57.

⁷ Andres Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 124–36.

the autumn of 1939. 'Not an inch to the Russians' was the dominant mood in the Finnish parliament, and while the government was prepared to discuss some minor adjustments to the border, it refused to accept Stalin's demand for a Soviet base on the Finnish south coast. One of the most vociferous critics of the Soviet moves was Eljas Erkkö, the Anglophile minister of foreign affairs and an influential press mogul, who insisted that Moscow was only bluffing when it claimed that Finnish stubbornness would result in war.⁸

Erkkö's confidence was founded on vague supportive signals he had received from Western powers, as well as on his incorrect assumption that, even if war was to break out, Finland would not be left to fend for itself. Such naivety was widespread among Finnish liberals and social democrats, many of whom after the outbreak of the Winter War on 30 November 1939 continued for weeks to hope for military intervention by Sweden. By that time, however, most of these wishful thinkers had been replaced in the cabinet by more realistic politicians. Until December 1940, the formal head of security policy was President Kyösti Kallio, but due to his incompetence and declining health, decisive power lay from the beginning in the hands of three members of the wartime cabinet.⁹

These three men, who until September 1944 made up the inner decision-making circle within Finnish politics, were the liberal economist and Prime Minister Risto Ryti; the conservative statesman J.K. Paasikivi (1870–1956), a former member of the Winter War cabinet who was to serve as president of the republic from 1946 to 1956; and the social democrat Väinö Tanner. Their military counterpart from the very start of the war was Field Marshal Gustaf Mannerheim (born 1867), who was appointed commander-in-chief of the Finnish forces despite his advanced age, and who remained in charge until the end of December 1944.

The visions, decisions and actions of these four men have been thoroughly scrutinized by numerous Finnish and other historians, who have tried to answer the same question: was Finland's military alliance with Germany really unavoidable, and who was responsible for it?¹⁰

The first time this matter was debated in public was at the Finnish War Guilt Trials in the winter of 1945–6. These were arranged at the behest

⁸ Ohto Manninen and Raimo Salokangas, *Eljas Erkkö: Vaikenematon valtiomahti* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2009), pp. 217–303.

⁹ Henrik Meinander, 'Risto Ryti: luonne, konteksti ja sattuma', in Seppo Tiihonen, Maritta Pohls and Juha Korppi-Tommola (eds.), *Presidentti johtaa: Suomalaisen valtiojohtamisen pitkä linja* (Helsinki: Siltala, 2013), pp. 125–44.

¹⁰ Ville Kivimäki, 'The Finnish History and Scholarship of World War II', in Tiina Kinnunen and Ville Kivimäki (eds.), *Finland in World War II: History, Memory, Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 1–46.

of the Allied leaders and ended predictably in long jail sentences for the eight accused politicians, among whom were the above-mentioned duo of Ryti and Tanner. However, neither the prosecutor nor the defendants were inclined to discuss the above-noted question openly. The politically constituted tribunal was supervised by a Soviet-led Control Commission that for obvious reasons forbade the defendants from referring to the consequences of the Winter War in their explanations as to why Finland drifted into the arms of Germany. The accused thus had no reason to tell the whole truth about what had happened, and instead stuck tightly to the same official version that had been broadcast to the Finnish citizenry and the international community when the well-prepared Finnish army joined Hitler's crusade in late June 1941. This version held that Finland had not wanted the conflict, and that in fighting it to the bitter end, had been waging a separate defensive war.¹¹

This so-called separate war thesis would remain the dominant interpretation among leading Finnish historians during the following three decades, since it supported their patriotic notions of Finnish innocence. But by the 1970s British and American researchers in particular had dug up enough evidence to suggest that the Finnish leaders had been informed of, and actively involved in, the preparations for Operation Barbarossa from an early stage. A low-profile retreat from the separate war thesis then took place, before the Finnish historian Mauno Jokipii dealt it a final blow in 1986 when he published his thorough analysis of the circumstances behind the Finno-German alliance. Since then, historians have focused more on determining how early the Finnish leaders made the decision to collaborate with the Germans, and to what degree Finland, as a German ally, could be seen as indirectly responsible for the Holocaust.¹²

The first sign that Germany was not indifferent to Finland's situation came in the early spring of 1940, during the last stage of the Winter War. Under the secret agreement in the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, Germany was to refrain from providing support if Finland was attacked, but the German strategy began to change when it became known that the British and French governments were planning a large-scale military expedition to northern Scandinavia. The primary motive of the Western powers was to cut off exports of iron ore from northern Sweden to Germany, but

¹¹ Henrik Meinander, 'Kriget, ansvaret och historiens domstol. Krigsansvarighetsdomstolens historiografi', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 2, 1996, 191–220.

¹² Henrik Meinander, 'A Separate Story? Interpretations of Finland in the Second World War', in Henrik Stenius, Mirja Österberg and Johan Östling (eds.), *Nordic Narratives of the Second World War: National Historiographies Revisited* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011), pp. 55–77.

they claimed that the expedition was meant to give military support to Finland.¹³

This maneuver was certainly not in the interests of a German war industry dependent on Swedish iron ore, and Hitler responded by occupying Denmark and Norway in April 1940. Hermann Göring also sent a strictly confidential message to the Finnish government in February 1940, urging Finland to make peace with the Soviet Union and hinting that any territorial losses would be returned once the European war was over. The threat of an intervention by the Western powers also persuaded the Soviet Union to bring the war against Finland to a prompt end. A confrontation in northern Scandinavia was not the only scenario envisaged at the time. Another was a French-British raid against Soviet oil infrastructure in the Black Sea region; this was in fact a more severe threat to the German-Soviet alliance, since the motorized German army was increasingly dependent on energy supplies from Romania and the Soviet Union.¹⁴

Towards an Alliance

On 13 March 1940 Finland and the Soviet Union signed a peace treaty in which the former lost one-tenth of its territory, and had to lease the southwest peninsula of Hanko to the latter as a naval base. The harsh peace conditions came as a severe shock to a Finnish population that had not been informed of how close their army had been to collapse. Many Finns had clung tightly to hopes of military support from the Western powers. Among these people were certain members of the cabinet, who knew that Finland had been urged by the Western powers to put forward an official request for military assistance, something that had repeatedly been postponed due to strong resistance from the Swedish and Norwegian governments.

With no such help forthcoming, Finnish Prime Minister Risto Ryti cited Göring's confidential missive in order to persuade his reluctant cabinet to accept Moscow's heavy peace demands. The Finnish scholar Heikki Ylikangas has characterized these cabinet discussions and the subsequent acceptance of the peace conditions as the first conscious step toward military alliance with Germany.¹⁵ However, this interpretation

¹³ Henrik Tala, *Talvisodan ranskalaiset ratkaisijat: Ranska apu Suomelle 1939–1940* (Helsinki: Minerva, 2014).

¹⁴ Kimmo Rentola, 'Residenttimme ilmoittaa...: Tiedustelun vaikutus Stalinin päätöksiin talvisodassa', in Eero Elfvengren (ed.), *Salaisen sodan sivut: Tiedustelua, vakoilua ja sala-toimintaa jatkosodassa* (Helsinki: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 2003), pp. 140–53.

¹⁵ Heikki Ylikangas, *Tulkintani talvisodasta* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2001), pp. 220–45.

has its weaknesses. No-one could have foreseen how and when the Soviet-German alliance would be dissolved. Even if the two dictatorships stood, in principle, for distinctly different ideologies, in the eyes of most people in Western democracies they both appeared to be totalitarian regimes with no respect for civil rights or legal order. Why should Ryti have trusted any promise from Berlin when it was obvious that, only a few months earlier, Hitler had been prepared to accept a Soviet invasion of Finland?

A more probable explanation is that Ryti consciously exaggerated the importance of Göring's message as a way of convincing his cabinet to ignore the equally vague promises from the Western powers, and instead to accept a harsh peace deal with Moscow. The lonely fight against the Red Army in the Winter War had gravely shaken Finnish trust in the Western powers, and the Finnish army by that stage was close to collapse. But the fact remains that the leading figures in the Finnish government stood much closer ideologically to the Scandinavian countries and the Western powers than to the fascist regimes in Europe. The most distinguished proponents of this democratic worldview were the prime minister himself and Field Marshal Mannerheim. In fact, many Finnish politicians had implored Ryti to accept the leadership of the government after the outbreak of the Winter War because they hoped that his outspoken Anglophile sympathies and excellent contacts in the Western financial elite could keep Finland from catastrophe.¹⁶

Mannerheim was also known for his Western sympathies. He had served for three decades in the Imperial Russian Army before returning to lead the Finnish White Army against the domestic Red Guards in the spring of 1918. Entente-minded as he was, he resigned as commander-in-chief immediately after the conflict, as a protest against the strong German involvement in Finland. For this reason he was soon requested to function as the temporary head of state to help repair the fractured relations with the victorious Western powers. He fulfilled this task brilliantly, but lost the first democratic presidential election in the summer of 1919 due to the antipathies he aroused among socialist voters. He returned to state administration as a senior military adviser in the early 1930s, when the political climate again required his geopolitical perspectives and Western contacts. These qualities also meant that despite his

¹⁶ Juha Tarkka, 'Pulavuodet ja Risto Ryrin talouspolitiikka', in *Tuntematon Risto Ryti* (Helsinki: Risto Ryti-seuran julkaisu I, 1993), pp. 27–44; Antti Kuusterä and Juha Tarkka, *Suomen Pankki 200 vuotta: Keisarin kassasta keskuspanniksi* (Helsinki: Otava, 2011), pp. 564–74.

age, he was again appointed commander-in-chief when the Winter War broke out.¹⁷

After agreeing to the peace treaty with the Soviet Union in March 1940, Ryti and Mannerheim were inclined to keep their options open. Immediately after the treaty was signed, the Finnish and Swedish governments put forward a plan for a Nordic Defence League together with Denmark and Norway, but within a week Moscow declared that this violated the peace treaty, under which the signatories had promised not to join any alliances against one another. Similar discussions on Nordic military collaboration had already come to nothing during the latter part of the 1930s, and the initiative lost the rest of its credibility after Germany invaded Denmark and Norway in early April 1940.¹⁸

The ending of the Winter War in no way changed Stalin's major goals concerning Finland; Moscow was as determined as ever to attach the country to its buffer zone.¹⁹ In July 1940 the Soviets completed their annexation of the Baltic states, and simultaneously intensified their demands for a concession covering the Finnish nickel mines at Pechenga on the Arctic coast; the German war industry had also begun to show an interest in this resource. Another effective means through which the USSR increased its pressure on Finland was Moscow's deliberate delay in implementing a major trade agreement signed by the two countries in late June 1940. Finland's situation was certainly not improved by the withdrawal of American credits, nor by a British trade embargo that closed the last Finnish import channel through the Pechenga harbor in the autumn of 1940. The Swedish government continued to advance credits and sell metal products but was not, for understandable reasons, prepared to trade its food reserves.²⁰

While Finland undoubtedly faced an awkward predicament, key people in government were receiving signals at this time that Germany had other interests in the country besides wanting a considerable share of the output of the Pechenga nickel mines. In late March 1940 the social democrat Foreign Minister Väinö Tanner was replaced in office by the famously Germanophile Professor Rolf Witting, who already before the

¹⁷ J.E.O. Screen, *Mannerheim: The Finnish Years* (London: Hurst, 2000), pp. 30–188.

¹⁸ Ohto Manninen, *Toteutumaton valtioliitto: Suomi ja Ruotsi talvisodan jälkeen* (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1977), pp. 11–43.

¹⁹ Ohto Manninen and Oleg A. Rzevski (eds.), *Puna-armeija Stalinin tentissä: Talvisodan jälkipuinti Kremlissä 14–17 April 1940* (Helsinki: Edita, 1997), pp. 453–8.

²⁰ Kari Nars, 'Suomen sodanaikainen talous ja talouspolitiikka', *Taloudellisia selvityksiä, Helsinki: Suomen Pankin taloustieteellisen tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja* 1966 (Sarja A:29), 83–95; Ilkka Nummela, *Inter arma silent revisores rationum, Toisen maailmansodan aiheuttama taloudellinen rasitus Suomessa vuosina 1939–1952* (Jyväskylä, Finland: Studia historica Jyväskylälänsia 46, 1993), pp. 262–7.

war had established good relations with Germany's wartime ambassador in Helsinki, Wipert von Blücher. This personal connection allowed the inner circle of the Finnish government to observe gradual changes in the German attitude towards Finland from the summer of 1940.²¹

In late June 1940 the two governments signed a number of trade agreements, which led to a considerable increase in Finnish imports from Germany, from 16 per cent of the total in 1939 to 52 per cent by the end of 1940. Nevertheless, Berlin was still careful not to irritate its formal Soviet ally, and thus emphasized to the Finns, through various diplomatic channels, that these deals should not be interpreted as a sign that Germany would question its relationship with the Soviet Union in the near future. However, the ambiguous expression 'in the near future' was naturally noticed in Helsinki. Along with these trade agreements, ambassador von Blücher held confidential talks with Foreign Minister Witting in which the Finn noted how rapidly the German expansion in Central Europe had created Germanophile feelings in Finland.²²

In late July 1940 Germany retreated from its demands for nickel from the Pechenga mines in exchange for a trade deal that allowed it instead to buy 60 per cent of the mine's production. The Finnish government was left to continue its concession negotiations with the Soviet Union alone. However, the German withdrawal was only tactical, since German forces had by then reached northern Norway; from there, they could easily, if need be, take over the Finnish mines on the other side of the border. This was obvious to the Finnish government, which from then on became even more reluctant to respond to Soviet coercion concerning control over the nickel mines.²³

In mid-August 1940 the German troops in northern Norway also played an important role in the next – and in many ways most crucial – step towards the Finno-German military alliance. In late July Hitler had sent Dr Ludwig Weissauer – a private adviser to German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, and a high-ranking SS officer – to carry out a secret investigation of Finnish defensive capacities and to hold discussions with Finnish Prime Minister Ryti and Commander-in-Chief Mannerheim. The Finnish leaders' message to Hitler was decisive: if Finland was once again left to fight alone against the Soviet Union, it could not survive longer than three months. Even if this estimate was pessimistic, it

²¹ Michael Jonas, *NS-Diplomatie und Bündnispolitik 1935–1944: Wipert von Blücher, das Dritte Reich und Finnland* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011), pp. 211–20.

²² Jonas 2011, 233–4.

²³ Esko Vuorisjärvi, *Petsamon nikkeli kansainvälisessä politiikassa 1939–1944* (Helsinki: Otava, 1990), pp. 52–172.

underlined two crucial points: the Finns would in no circumstances capitulate to the Soviet Union, and so German support for Finland would not be in vain.²⁴

Having received Weissauer's report, Hitler on 10 August 1940 decided to support Finland by allowing it to secretly buy German weapons. In exchange, he requested that German troops be allowed unobstructed passage through Finland to northern Norway. This request was delivered to the inner circle of the Finnish government by Hitler's secret messenger, the arms trader Joseph Veltjens. The latter received a positive reply directly from Field Marshal Mannerheim when they met late on the evening of 18 August, and the next day this reply to Veltjens was officially confirmed by Prime Minister Ryti.²⁵

The importance of Hitler's request was immediately clear to the Finnish leaders, who during the first half of August had faced large demonstrations encouraged by Moscow; subsequently, the Finnish government had forbidden mass meetings and interned numerous communist leaders. At the same time, Moscow had increased its demands to be allowed to transport troops through Finnish territory to its marine base on the peninsula of Hanko. Taking these actions together, Mannerheim saw them as preparations for a Soviet invasion, and on 8 August he urged that the army be mobilized. But after the government had reached its secret deal with Germany, the crisis was quelled without the need for military mobilization. The Red Army was granted land access to Hanko in early September after it was agreed that troops and weapons would be transported in separate railway wagons.²⁶

This sudden Finnish flexibility should be seen as stemming from the fact that the country had already secretly reached the earlier-mentioned transit deal and arms agreement with Germany. Together with the intensified Finno-German trade, this steadily increased the expectations within the small circle of the cabinet who were privy to the developments that there would be even closer co-operation with Berlin. It should nonetheless be noted that despite these signals of German interest in Finland, this inner circle would receive no specific information from Hitler's headquarters before December 1940 concerning the role the Germans

²⁴ Ohto Manninen, 'Ludwig Weissauer i hemliga uppdrag 1940–1943', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 1975, 178–181; Ohto Manninen and Kauko Rumpunen (eds.) *Käymme omaa erillistä sotaamme: Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940–1944* (Helsinki: Edita, 2006), pp. 29–30.

²⁵ Tuomo Polvinen, *J.K. Paasikivi: Valtiomiehen elämätyö 3 1939–1944* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1995), pp. 213–15.

²⁶ Polvinen 1995, 191–211.

projected for Finland in the increasing power struggle between the two dictatorships.²⁷

One obvious reason for this uncertainty was the extreme secrecy required by the German preparations for the attack on the Soviet Union. Typically, the German ambassador in Helsinki, von Blücher, was kept entirely in the dark about the transit and arms deal between the countries in August 1940.²⁸ Another cause of the ambiguity was that Finland was gradually assigned a more active role as the strategy for the operation was developed in the autumn of 1940. This was especially the case after Hitler altered his original plan for the eastern crusade – a plan that had actually existed since 1939²⁹ – in early December 1940, deciding to target Leningrad before Moscow. Earlier, the main plan had been to secure control of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland with support from the Finnish navy and coastal artillery, before advancing from northern Norway and Finland towards Murmansk. But when Leningrad became the prime target the Finnish army, close to the Russian metropolis, was understandably offered a more active role in proceedings.³⁰

In mid-November 1940 Molotov visited Berlin, seeking among other purposes to obtain German approval for a Soviet offensive against Finland based on their original agreement from August 1939. Hitler refused to agree, arguing that an invasion of Finland could not happen while Germany was at war and in need of the country's nickel and timber. A week later the Finnish duo of Mannerheim and Ryti was informed through military channels of Berlin's standpoint and reassured that 'unnecessary compliance' towards Moscow was no longer required.

The first more substantial knowledge the Finnish leadership had of the German war preparations came on 18 December 1940; that is, the same day Hitler signed off on the plan for Operation Barbarossa. That day, Mannerheim's emissary Major General Paavo Talvela had a secret meeting in Berlin with Reich Marshal Hermann Göring and General Franz Halder, in which the Finns made two proposals: a Finno-Swedish

²⁷ Polvinen 1995, 215–19; Henrik Meinander, *Den nödvändiga grannen: Studier & inlägg* (Esbo: Schildts, 2001), pp. 118–19.

²⁸ Jonas 2011, 236–48.

²⁹ Rolf-Dieter Müller, 'Barbarossa' 1939? Betrachtungen über die deutschen Kriegsplanungen und Optionen im Jahre 1939', in Michael Jonas et al. (eds.), *Dynamiken der Gewalt: Krieg im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Ideologie und Gesellschaft* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015) 255–68; Michael Jonas, 'Hitlerin horisontin laitamilla' in Henrik Meinander (ed.), *Historian kosto: Suomen talvisota kehäksissään* (Helsinki: Siltala 2015), pp. 93–103.

³⁰ Gerd R. Ueberschär, 'Die Einbeziehung Skandinaviens in Planung 'Barbarossa'', in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Band 4* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983 [1983a]), pp. 365–403.

defence alliance as a complement to the Finno-German 'co-operation in the resistance against the Russian exertions', and joint general staff planning for war.³¹

The idea of a Finno-Swedish union had already been rejected by the Soviet Union in November, when it had been proposed to both Moscow and Berlin. Now it was the turn of the Germans to shoot it down, since neither Germany nor the USSR wanted a third independent actor involved in power politics in northern Europe. Nevertheless, Göring at the same meeting accepted the second Finnish request. Without revealing any details, he made it very clear that Germany was planning an attack to its east:

If Finland wants to exist it must advance together with Germany coherently and without hesitation. If Germany is defeated, Finland will anyhow also be lost. But Germany will not be defeated. Germany cannot lose and when it wins, Finland also wins.³²

A Retreating Democracy

The first German troops were transported through Finland in mid-September 1940, causing an immediate and widespread wave of relief among the Finns. During the two months that followed, it must have become clear to almost everyone that Germany was also reinforcing its support to Finland in other respects: Finno-German trade increased step by step and the reorganized Finnish army was swiftly rearmed with German weapons. On top of this, the Finnish press and the national radio broadcaster alternated between reports of stunning German war successes in continental Europe and inspiring stories of civic and cultural events in Finland arranged together with German counterparts.³³

These enthusiastic reactions were understandable, keeping in mind the still very fresh memories from the Winter War and the well-grounded fears of a Soviet invasion. Still, it is striking how easily the clearly skeptical attitude towards the Third Reich in pre-war Finland was transformed in 1940 into a growing acceptance of and even a tentative interest in Germany's ideology and war exploits. To understand this, it is crucial to remember that as part of Lutheran Europe the

³¹ Jokipii 1986, 147–52.

³² Paavo Talvela, *Sotilaan elämä: Muistelmia I*, Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1976, 250–67, quotation from p. 265.

³³ Jokipii 1986, 223–32; Markku Jokisipilä and Janne Könönen, *Kolmannen valtakunnan vieraat: Suomi Hitlerin Saksan vaikutuspiirissä 1933–1944* (Helsinki: Otava, 2013), pp. 341–90.

Nordic countries represented a cultural periphery of the German-speaking world, and until the Second World War had even employed German as their lingua franca.

This bond had taken on new forms following German unification in 1871, as Germany developed into a leading industrial state with the Nordic realm as one of its important markets. In the Finnish Revolution of 1918 German forces secured victory for the Whites; this generated a strong sense of gratitude towards Germany within the Finnish bourgeoisie, and explains much of its sympathy towards Hitler's actions. In addition, over 2,000 Finns had illegally joined the German army in 1915–16 to fight against their Russian rulers and to prepare for a war of liberation against the Russians. These so-called *Jaeger* soldiers also played an important role in defeating the Red Guards, and their elite would eventually come to dominate the Finnish General Staff during the Second World War. Not surprisingly, these officers would co-operate assiduously with the German military throughout the Finno-German *Waffenbrüderschaft* (brotherhood in arms) between 1941 and 1944.³⁴

The decisive exception to this rule was Commander-in-Chief Mannerheim, a loyal servant of the Russian emperors until 1917. Despite the intensified preparations for the military alliance with the Germans in the winter of 1940–41, both Mannerheim and Ryti were still privately inclined to hope for an outcome to the forthcoming clash similar to that in the First World War. First, Germany would crush Russia, and then the Western powers would defeat Germany; finally, Finland would regain its lost territories and, with any luck, even expand a little to the east.³⁵ This required subtle shifts in Finland's diplomatic rhetoric when communicating with representatives of the various great powers. Meeting with German ambassador von Blücher, Ryti eagerly admitted the weaknesses of Finnish democracy and praised the Nazi solutions to social problems. But when he spoke with British and American diplomats he conversely described Finland as a Nordic democracy fighting for its survival.³⁶

Pro-German attitudes also existed throughout the interwar period in the other Nordic countries, though these had not been dragged into the

³⁴ Numerous biographies have been published of these *Jaeger* generals. See for example, Martti Turtola, *Erik Heinrichs: Mannerheimin ja Paasikiven kenraali* (Helsinki: Otava, 1988); Martti Sinerma, *Lauri Malmberg ja suojeluskunnat* (Helsinki: Otava, 1995); Vesa Määttä, *K.L. Oesch: Ylivoimaa vastaan* (Helsinki: Gummerus, 2015).

³⁵ Juhani Paasivirta, *Suomi ja Eurooppa 1939–1956: Sotien ja murrosten ajanjakso* (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1992), p. 152; Martti Turtola, *Risto Ryti: Elämä isänmaan puolesta* (Helsinki: Otava, 1994), p. 257; J.E.O. Screen, *Mannerheim* (Helsinki: Otava, 2011), pp. 307–8.

³⁶ Manninen and Rumpunen 2006, 33–43.

Great War. Unlike the Baltic states, which for centuries had had a sizeable German-speaking upper class, the Nordic peoples felt no ingrained sense of inferiority towards the Germans and their high culture. Quite the opposite: German high culture was so profoundly admired that the brutality and vulgar populism of Hitler's regime was excused by many moderate Scandinavians, who saw it as a regrettable but necessary reaction against the unfair Versailles peace treaty and against the Communist threat to European civilization.³⁷

Anti-communist sentiments in Finland were charged with a harsh Russophobia, felt not only by conservatives and liberals, but also by many social democrats. These sentiments stemmed from the earlier conflicts with Russia and from the active involvement of the Bolshevik government in the 1918 revolution in Finland; both of these factors encouraged a deep mistrust between the countries. The antipathies concerned were freely expressed in public life, and provided the basis for the defensive spirit taught to conscripts in the Finnish army and to the bourgeois Civil Guards.³⁸

It was thus only a short step to silent approval of the manic anti-communism of Hitler's Germany, not least since many Finns saw the Nazi regime as much less evil than the Soviet Union. Early in March 1941 J.K. Paasikivi wrote to Risto Ryti (who had himself become president in December 1940): 'Whatever opinion you might have about the current system in Germany, it is a thousand times better than to be under Soviet rule, which would mean our death.'³⁹

It should be noted, however, that Paasikivi took this resolute position only after the bitter experiences of the Winter War. Until the autumn of 1939 pro-German attitudes had rarely extended to outspoken fascist sympathies or to support for Hitler's expansionist foreign policy. Indeed, relatively few Finns during the 1930s voted for the domestic fascist party, the Patriotic People's Movement, which arose after a populist right-wing movement had met its end during an inept attempted coup d'état in 1932. The fascists gained only 7 per cent of the votes in the national elections of 1933 and 1936, and this figure declined to 4 per cent in the last

³⁷ Johan Östling, *Nazismens sensmoral: Svenska erfarenheter i andra världskrigets efterdymning* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2008), pp. 13–50; Annette Forsén, *Tysk föreningsverksamhet i Finland och Sverige 1910–1950* (Möklinta: Gidlunds, 2015), pp. 28–39, 200–260; Jokisipilä and Könönen 2013, 497–508.

³⁸ Matti Klinge, 'Ryssänviha', in Matti Klinge, *Vihan veljistä valtiososialismiin: Yhteiskunnallisia ja kansallisia näkemyksiä 1910- ja 1920-luvuilta* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1972), pp. 57–112; Kari Immonen, *Ryssästä saa puhua... Neuvostoliitto suomalaisessa julkisuudessa ja kirjat julkisuuden muotona 1918–1939* (Helsinki: Otava, 1987).

³⁹ Polvinen 1995, p. 278.

election before the war, in 1939; the latter poll resulted in a parliament dominated by social democrats and centre parties. In 1938 the Finnish minister of the interior put forward a law that would have prohibited the Patriotic People's Movement, which had begun to question the country's democratic constitution and had applauded the German invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, the proposal had legal shortcomings and was quickly withdrawn on the outbreak of the Winter War, when national unity had to be secured.⁴⁰

Outside the political sphere, scientific and cultural co-operation between Finland and Germany had expanded during the 1930s, and from the autumn of 1940, when Hitler decided to give the Finns a more active role in the war against the Soviet Union, these areas provided more effective channels for Nazi charm offensives. Writers, artists and actors who had established contacts in Germany before the war increased these ties, but generally speaking the creative class maintained a reserved attitude towards Nazi culture. Nor did the improved relations have a radical impact on the interaction between Finnish and German scientists. This interaction continued a long tradition, and due to Finland's war-time isolation from Western Europe, remained relatively dynamic until the autumn of 1943.⁴¹

The first clear sign of the dramatically improved relations was a triple international athletic competition between Finland, Sweden and Germany in Helsinki in late September 1940, in which the German athletes honored the Finnish war cripples in the audience with a collective 'Heil Hitler' salute. The Finnish fascists naturally took the chance to articulate their sympathies for Hitler more brazenly than ever, but had no noticeable success in recruiting new members, despite their obvious momentum. More successful in their propaganda were a number of Finnish-German societies, which arranged numerous nationwide lecture series and film evenings during the winter of 1940–1, with suggestive pictures of the ever-expanding Germany and its 'Sieg im Westen'.⁴²

The Finnish press maintained a more ambivalent attitude towards the German dictatorship. The leading bourgeois newspapers gave ample space to the German victories on the western front and avoided negative expressions concerning Hitler and his party. However, they also articulated their concern over the future of the small states of Europe,

⁴⁰ Soikkanen 1983, pp. 242–72; Jonas 2011, pp. 87–108.

⁴¹ Marjatta Hietala, 'Tutkija ja Saksan suunta', in Marjatta Hietala (ed.), *Tutkijat ja sota: Suomalaisten tutkijoiden kontakteja ja kohtaloita toisen maailmansodan aikana* (Helsinki: SHS, 2006), pp. 30–141; Jyrki Paaskoski, *Oppineiden yhteisö: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia 1908–2008* (Helsinki: Otava, 2008), pp. 160–74.

⁴² Jokipii 1986, pp. 46–9; Jokisipilä and Könönen 2013, pp. 355–91.

published western war reports and reminded their readers that the United States could join Great Britain in the war. The only party press organs that dared to question explicitly the benefits of a German victory and Nazi visions of the future Europe were the social democratic dailies. Referring to the Battle of Britain, for example, the leading paper *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* (the *Finnish Social Democrat*) emphasized that nothing could yet be said about the outcome of the war.⁴³

When the Finno-German military alliance began to take concrete shape in the spring of 1941, the pro-German campaign took on more overt forms. Numerous initiatives were organized in co-operation with the German authorities; the most prestigious was the recruiting of around 1,400 Finnish volunteers to the German SS corps. The suggestion came from German SS officers who, in the autumn of 1940, encouraged Finnish officer colleagues to organize the recruitment drive as a bold demonstration of Finland's willingness to adopt the German line. Not surprisingly, both parties were keen to present it as a restoration of the earlier-mentioned Finno-German *Jaeger* movement during the First World War.⁴⁴

The importance of this proposal was understood immediately in Helsinki. The government carefully avoided official involvement in the recruiting, and tried to ensure that Finnish soldiers would not be deployed against enemies other than the Soviet Union. Other sensitive issues were the SS oath to the Führer, and the possibility of Finnish soldiers fighting in the same units as SS soldiers from Denmark, Norway and Netherlands; Finland was desperate to avoid any association with volunteers from countries occupied by German forces. The recruiting was originally aimed especially at Swedish-speaking Finns, who according to Nazi ideology were more Aryan than the Finnish-speaking majority; however, when Swedish speakers showed no special interest in becoming SS troops, the campaign was directed at all Finns.

In the end, the two parties reached a compromise. A little over 400 of the 1,400 Finnish SS soldiers were sent to various units of the multi-European Wiking Division, which fought its whole war on the eastern

⁴³ Paasivirta 1992, pp. 90–128.

⁴⁴ Mauno Jokipii, *Panttipataljoona: Suomalaisen SS-pataljoonan historia* (Helsinki: W+G, 1968), Jokipii 1986, pp. 187–207; Matti Lackman and Esko Riekkö, *Jääkärivärä: Etsivän Keskuspoliisin päällikkö, SS-pataljoonan luojat* (Helsinki: SKS, 2007), pp. 384–404; Mauno Jokipii, *Hitlerin Saksa ja sen vapaaehtoisliikkeet: Waffen-SS:n suomalaispataljoona vertailevana* (Helsinki: SKS, 2013). For an acute analysis of the history and culture of the Finnish SS soldiers, see Oula Silvennoinen, 'Kumpujen yöhön – eli kuinka historiallinen muisti vääristyi', in Sari Näre and Jenni Kirves (eds.), *Luvattu maa: Suur-Suomen unelma ja unohdus* (Helsinki: Johnny Kniga, 2014), pp. 45–52.

front, whereas the rest of the Finns formed a separate Finnish battalion within the Wiking division. The oath dilemma was also resolved smoothly: foreign SS soldiers would swear their loyalty to 'the Leader of the Great-Germanic Community'. Mobilization began in May 1941, with the last Finnish SS soldiers reaching their training camps in Central Europe less than a week before Operation Barbarossa began. By the time the Finns were sent home two years later, to continue the war with the Finnish army, 255 of them had fallen in battles in Ukraine and the North Caucasus.⁴⁵

When the Finnish SS soldiers were shipped to Germany in May 1941, only a handful of decision-makers in Finland were fully aware of how far the military preparations for a joint Finnish-German attack had advanced. These were Mannerheim and Ryti, as well as Prime Minister Jukka Rangell, Foreign Minister Rolf Witting, Defence Minister Rudolf Walden and the social democrat Minister of Supply Väinö Tanner. Some of the other ministers had received hints as to what was happening, but the two other social democrat ministers in the cabinet were left totally ignorant of developments until early June, and would thus protest against the cabinet decision of 10 June to mobilize the Finnish army.

By that date, all the main preparations for war had been made. On the same day President Ryti and Foreign Minister Witting informed the chairmen of the parliamentary party groups of the mobilization. The moods among the latter varied from feelings of revenge and expressions of confidence to worry and irritation. Ryti claimed that Finland was being forced to mobilize due to the mounting threat of a war between Germany and the Soviet Union in which the Red Army might try to advance to the north-west. This was obviously not the whole truth, and the social democrats and liberals in particular expressed doubts as to whether the decision had been made according to the constitution. Still, they were not entirely blind to developments: they had noticed the continuing movement of German troops to northern Finland and the recruitment of the Finnish SS volunteers.⁴⁶

Among the most frustrated social democratic opponents of mobilization was the senior parliamentarian, former foreign minister and history professor Väinö Voionmaa, who saw pacifist and democratic ideals disintegrating even in his own party. Though undoubtedly exaggerating, he claimed that the Finnish parliament had once again become polarized,

⁴⁵ Jokipii 1986, pp. 200–1.

⁴⁶ Maria Lähteenmäki, *Väinö Voionmaa: Puolue- ja geopolitiikko* (Helsinki: SKS, 2014), pp. 345–61.

this time into a democratic block and a Nazi one. A week before war again broke out, the distressed Voionmaa wrote a long letter to his son Toivo, the Finnish envoy in Geneva. In this, he spelled out his anger and disbelief at how easily his colleagues – even his fellow party member Väinö Tanner, whom he had trusted so much – had become blind war fanatics: ‘With a few slogans, false claims and limp arguments, and above all by titillating patriotic passions, the crowd is driven like cattle into all kinds of insanity.’⁴⁷

Countdown

This gradual retreat from openness and from the democratic order was, in fact, a conscious decision based on the experiences of the Winter War, when the democratic decision-making process had shown its weaknesses. The Finnish case is thus a good example of the extent to which the functioning of a national democracy depends not only on the stability of its own political culture, but also on the global economy and geopolitical chain reactions. In the spring of 1941 Finnish newspapers and other forums of public opinion revealed a growing acceptance of, or at least a mental preparation for, a less democratic order. In some quarters this was interpreted as a troubling step towards a more autocratic regime, but mostly this departure from democratic principles was described as a political necessity if the extensive rearmament and mental fortification required for the forthcoming war were to take place. Indeed, the whole of Finnish society had been preparing itself for further fighting ever since the end of the Winter War.⁴⁸

In his classic study of Churchill’s first week as prime minister in May 1940, John Lukacs has pointed out that the new leader had a much more realistic idea of the prevailing sentiment in the provinces than most Londoners did. The elite was prepared for peace but the people wanted to continue the fight against Hitler.⁴⁹ The Finnish decision makers had also to negotiate an ambiguous emotional landscape. Apart from trying to cope with the pressure from the two dictatorships, Ryti and his cabinet were faced with a number of severe societal problems resulting from the Winter War. However, in the spring of

⁴⁷ Väinö Voionmaa, *Kuriiripostia 1941–1946* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1971), p. 39.

⁴⁸ Tuomas Tepora, *Sinun puolesta elää ja kuolla: Suomen liput, nationalismi ja veriuhri 1917–1945* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2011), pp. 270–91; Tuomas Tepora, *Sodan henki: Kaunis ja ruma talvisota* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2015), pp. 298–313.

⁴⁹ John Lukacs, *Five Days in London, May 1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

1941 opinion polls showed a popular readiness for a new war, even if it required both a curtailment of democratic procedures and an alliance with Hitler's Germany.⁵⁰

The preparations for the new war advanced on three levels. First, the military leadership had conducted equally reassuring surveys of the popular mood during their fevered preparations for a new confrontation with the Soviet Union. After a thorough reorganization in the autumn of 1940, the country's defence was divided geographically into sixteen military units, each of which was to deliver one division to the conscript army. Finland could thus, within ten days, mobilize a force of almost half a million soldiers, while recruiting 50,000 women to maintenance units within the army. Relative to the Finnish population (3.7 million), this was a greater mobilization than in any other country involved in the Second World War. When Goebbels in February 1943 called on the German people to engage in total war, the Finns had already been doing so since June 1941.⁵¹

The second crucial element in the war preparations consisted of the large quantities of modern weapons, motor vehicles and communications technology bought from Germany; these had doubled the firepower and maneuverability of the Finnish army within the space of a year. Unlike other German allies, due to its strategic importance Finland could buy German arms, provisions and other essential goods on credit. German-occupied Europe thus indirectly subsidized the Finnish war effort, and lost a considerable portion of this investment when Finland withdrew from the alliance in September 1944. Under the terms of the armistice treaty, this debt was instead paid to the Soviet Union.⁵²

The third central foundation for Operation Barbarossa took shape in Lapland in northern Finland, where German forces with Finnish support began improving the regional infrastructure according to the same formula as in Norway and many other parts of German-occupied Europe. From the very early stages of Operation Barbarossa, the German leaders had decided to take control over this part of Finland in order to secure transport routes from the nickel mines at Pechenga and the iron ore mines in northern Sweden. Even if this infrastructure was far from ready when war broke out, it nonetheless aided considerably the advance by the six

⁵⁰ Eino Jutikkala, *Valtion tiedoituslaitoksen salainen sotakronikka* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1997), pp. 9–29.

⁵¹ Turtola 1988, pp. 163–80; Määttä 2015, pp. 202–9.

⁵² A.O. Ritschl, 'Nazi economic imperialism and the exploitation of the small: Evidence from Germany's secret foreign exchange balances, 1938–1940', *The Economic History Review* 54(2), 2001, 330–334, Henrik Meinander, *Finland 1944: Krig, Samhälle, känslo-landskap* (Helsingfors: Söderströms, 2009), p. 264; Antti Kuusterä and Juha Tarkka, *Suomen Pankki 200 vuotta: Parlamentin pankki* (Helsinki: Otava, 2012), pp. 71–7.

German divisions (200,000 soldiers) that secretly took up positions in early June along the northern half of Finland's eastern border.⁵³

All these arrangements were agreed upon in top secret meetings between the German and Finnish commands from the end of January 1941. The decisive negotiations took place on 30 January 1941 when the Chief of the Finnish General Staff, Lieutenant-General Erik Heinrichs, flew to Berlin for a meeting with the Supreme High Command of the German Army. The German generals began by outlining their main plan to attack Leningrad, and suggested that the Finns could participate in this operation. As expected, Heinrichs agreed and then outlined the Finnish proposal: their army could join the offensive on Leningrad from both sides of the large Lake Ladoga, but preferably with a focus on the northern and eastern side of the lake. This suited the Germans, who in exchange promised to shoulder responsibility for the northern half of the Finnish front.⁵⁴

According to notes made by Gerhard Engel, Hitler's adjutant major, Heinrichs emphasized that the partnership would be difficult 'because the Finns did not want a pact or break with the United States under any circumstances, nor with Britain if possible'. Hitler was informed of the Finnish standpoint and had no objections to their cautiousness, adding that it was always good to have a brave and vengeful ally like Finland on one's side. Other concerns voiced by Heinrichs were Finland's food supply and its access to sea transport, but the Germans responded reassuringly to these questions too. Hitler remarked that 'Finnish nickel was as important for us as oil and cereals were for the Finns' and gave his generals carte blanche to continue the negotiations with the Finns.⁵⁵

During the next three months exchanges of information and discussion of the specifics of the shared plans continued at a lower level. This increased the Finnish determination to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining any kind of control over the Pechenga nickel mines. But the Germans were naturally wary of revealing too much about their overriding strategy in Europe to the Finnish leaders, who had become worried that the eastern attack might be postponed due to the Italian fiasco and German intervention on the Balkan front. These concerns were also

⁵³ Ueberschär 1983 [1983a], pp. 388–403; Gerd R. Ueberschär, 'Kriegsführung und Politik in Nordeuropa', in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Band 4* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983 [1983b]), pp. 810–11.

⁵⁴ Jokipii 1986, pp. 157–61.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160; Gerhard Engel, *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938–1943* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974), p. 93; quotation from the English edition, Gerhard Engel, *At the Heart of the Reich: The Secret Diary of Hitler's Army Adjutant* (London: Greenhill, 2005), p. 102.

fuelled by rumours – deliberately spread by the Germans – of a large new deal with the Soviet Union, but in May 1941 the pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place. First, the Finnish leadership was asked to suggest the location of Finland's future border in the east, self-evidently based on the presumption that the Soviet Union would be crushed. This soon resulted in megalomaniac proposals based on earlier visions of 'Greater Finland'.⁵⁶ Then on 25 May Lieutenant-General Heinrichs and a handful of other Finnish staff officers were called to negotiations in Salzburg in which the provisional battle tactics outlined in January were confirmed and mapped out in detail. The German troops in southern Finland would take instructions from the Finnish command, and the Finnish troops in Lapland vice versa.

Over the following weeks all these plans were set in stone, and discreet preparations were made for the mobilization of the Finnish army, though none of this was made public. On the evening of 16 June General Waldemar Erfurth, the German liaison officer for Finland, reported from Helsinki that Mannerheim wished to delay the Finnish offensive by two to three days: 'In this way, the Finns want to give the political impression to their people and parliament that developments have forced them into it.'⁵⁷ The next day the Finnish headquarters was informed of the exact date and time that the operation would commence, and on 18 June mobilization orders were sent out by mail from the Finnish headquarters to each conscript soldier.

The countdown had now begun for Finland as well. At 5:30 am on the Sunday morning, two hours after Operation Barbarossa had officially been launched, Joseph Goebbels read Hitler's proclamation in a radio broadcast and declared war on the Soviet Union, accusing it of grave provocations. To reinforce the point, the proclamation asserted that Molotov's demands in November 1940 concerning Romania, Finland and Bulgaria were designed to foment war, and had had monumental consequences. The result, Hitler declared through Goebbels, was that German, Finnish and Romanian soldiers now stood side-by-side against their mutual enemy. Concerning Finland in particular, the German leader declared:

⁵⁶ Väinö Auer and Eino Jutikkala, *Finnlands Lebensraum: Das geographische und geschichtliche Finnland* (Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1941); Jalmari Jaakkola, *Die Ostfrage Finnlands* (Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1942).

⁵⁷ Helge Seppälä, *Suomi hyökkääjänä 1941* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1984), p. 97: 'Finnen wollen dadurch vor eigenem Volk und Volkvertretung polit. Eindruck erwecken, in den Ablauf der Ereignisse hineingezogen zu werden.'

United with their Finnish comrades, the fighters of the victory of Narvik are standing in the Northern Arctic. German divisions commanded by the conqueror of Norway [General Dietl], together with the heroes of Finnish freedom under their Marshal [Mannerheim], are protecting Finnish soil.⁵⁸

These were undoubtedly embarrassing sentences for the Finnish government, which wanted to give the impression that the country was a passive victim forced into war. In response, the Finnish leadership released a statement the same morning in which it declared Finland's neutrality in the conflict; it renewed this declaration the following day, in order to maintain the impression of innocence. At this point, the Finnish government was concerned at what might happen if the Soviet Union avoided open military action against Finland, since German forces were already actively using airports and harbours in southern Finland, and the Finnish army was positioning itself for its own eastward offensive. The increased intensity of Soviet air attacks against Finland over the next few days came almost as a blessing for the Finnish war cabinet and military headquarters.⁵⁹

The first ground attack from Finnish soil was launched on 29 June by the German troops in Pechenga close to the Ice Sea coast. In line with the secret agreement reached in early June 1941, the German military had concentrated six divisions on the northern half of the Finnish eastern border, which the Wehrmacht was responsible for. One week before the start of Operation Barbarossa this force was strengthened with two Finnish divisions, which were to fight under German command in Lapland. However, the offensive towards the strategically crucial harbour town of Murmansk soon ran into problems and in early October 1941 the German troops were ordered to establish defensive positions for winter, which had arrived earlier than usual. Further south on the German front in Finland the advance was more successful, but even here the main task to cut off of the railway between Murmansk and central Russia was never achieved.⁶⁰

On the southern half of the Finnish front the offensive was deliberately delayed. The 'brothers-in-arms' had agreed that the Finnish attack would start as soon as German forces had reached Leningrad. On 8 July Franz Halder, the Chief of the German General Staff, informed his Finnish colleague that the offensive towards the Russian metropolis would begin two days later. Consequently, on 10 July the Finnish army hit the Soviet

⁵⁸ Hitler's Barbarossa Proclamation 22 June 1941: www.ihr.org/jhr/v19/v19n6p50_Hitler.html (last accessed 18 December 2015)

⁵⁹ Jokipii 1986, pp. 551–628.

⁶⁰ Ueberschär 1983b, pp. 811–25.



Figure 1.1 Finnish soldiers crossing the Soviet border. The inscription in Russian reads 'Finland' (Virolahti, 29 June 1941).

front with maximum force and advanced over the next five months as far east as the western shores of Lake Onega.⁶¹

The Red Army had to defend a huge frontline from the Barents Sea in the north down to the Black Sea and was thus clearly outnumbered by the considerably enlarged Finnish army, which had been equipped with new weaponry from Germany. Finland's early military success nurtured visions of a 'Greater Finland', but gradually over the course of 1941 it became obvious that the Germans had gravely underestimated the capacity of the Soviet enemy. The newly conquered land had cost the lives of some 25,000 Finnish soldiers and during the winter of 1941–2 Finland was hit by a severe food shortage, which shook the fighting spirit and led many to question belief in a victorious end.

In early December 1941, after the Finnish army had halted its offensive at Lake Onega, the Finno-Soviet war turned into a two-and-a-half year long positional war. During this stage of the war Mannerheim would decline numerous requests by the Germans to take a more active part in the siege of Leningrad. In spite of being a sworn anti-communist, Mannerheim understood that any involvement in the assault on Leningrad would so offend Soviet pride that any prospect of a future negotiated settlement would be irrevocably harmed.⁶²

Relative Importance and Impact

What then was the relative importance and concrete impact of the Finnish participation in the war on the eastern front from 1941–4? Compared to the German forces and its war industry, the Finnish army played only a marginal role in the huge eastward attack, which by any measure constituted the most important front in Europe during the Second World War. Nine out of ten soldiers killed in Europe died along this almost 3,000 km long frontier and most of them were Soviet and German soldiers. Finnish military deaths during this war numbered some 70,000, which together with the losses in the Winter War rose to a total number of 95,000 soldiers. In absolute terms, these military losses were clearly less than Hungary (300,000) or Romania (300,000), but relative to the size of its population, the number of fallen Finnish soldiers (2.3 per cent) was proportionally higher than Romanian military deaths (1.6 per cent).

⁶¹ Seppälä 1984, pp. 105–37; Ari Raunio, 'Jatkosota, hyökkäysvaihe', in *Sotien vuodet 1939–1945* (Pori: Satakunnan maanpuolustusyhdistys, 2009), pp. 48–63.

⁶² Pasi Tuunainen, 'The Finnish Army at War: Operations and Soldiers, 1939–45', in Kinnunen – Kivimäki (eds.), *Finland in World War II*, 2011, pp. 153–9.

Due to the enormous Hungarian and Romanian deaths in the Holocaust, a comparison of the civilian losses would make no sense. The total number of Finnish civilian deaths during the war 1939–45 came to only 2,000 people. Importantly, not a single Finnish citizen of Jewish origin was ever handed over to the Germans. The main reason for the astonishingly low number of civilian deaths was that Finland, contrary to the other German allies on the eastern front, had responsibility for its own frontline, which ran along the southern half of its eastern border, that is, from the Gulf of Finland up to the northern half of the country. This area of the front never suffered a collapse and the country, thereby, avoided a disastrous occupation.

Although nominally under Finnish command, the Wehrmacht was in practice in charge of the northern half of the Finnish frontline throughout the period of the Finno-German alliance (1941–4). The Finnish front (referring to the southern half of Finland) was roughly speaking 600 km long and, as such, constituted one fifth of the whole eastern front. Due



Figure 1.2 Leonid Shavykin, a Finnish national of Russian descent and a Winter War veteran, is urging the Soviets to surrender (Ilomantsi, Tolvajärvi, 6 August 1941).

to Finland's position on the northern flank in the siege of Leningrad and northeast corner of the Baltic Sea, the small Nordic nation maintained responsibility for strategically important parts of the war in the east. As a consequence, the Finnish army was rather well equipped with German weaponry throughout the war and the shortage of food on the Finnish home front was eased by considerable imports from German-occupied Europe.⁶³

The German leadership utilized this reliance on food and weaponry to keep Finland in line, but simultaneously they understood that they were themselves dependent on the Finnish military in the Baltic area. The Finns were thus clearly prioritized in the German support of its allies; in fact Finland was so highly valued that it was the only ally allowed to buy German goods and weaponry on credit. This privilege was maintained up until the end of their alliance in September 1944, whereas the German treatment of its other allies had worsened even before the disaster at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942–3. As Michael Jonas pointed out in his thorough comparison of Finland and Hitler's Axis allies, the presence of Germans on the ground in these other states allowed relations to slip into quasi German occupation regimes, which was reflected by the increasingly scornful attitude towards them.⁶⁴

Typically enough, in late January 1943 Goebbels blamed the German allies for the first monumental defeats on the southeastern section of the eastern front, writing in his diary: 'they have lost their military honor to such an extent that, after the war, there won't be any doubt whatsoever who will have to lead Europe and who won't.' Among the German soldiers this same attitude was expressed even more harshly. When the Romanian troops, together with their Italian and Hungarian counterparts, retreated from the battle of Stalingrad, it was reported that they were abused by passing German forces, who threw packaged excrement, and sometimes even hand grenades, at their completely worn-out allies.⁶⁵

At the same time, the German military officers and diplomats who were stationed in Finland would continue to emphasize in their official communications, as well as everyday contacts with their Finnish colleagues, that the *Waffenbrüderschaft* was based on 'mutual respect'. Hitler would also maintain this standpoint even after the spring of 1943 when the Finnish government for the first time expressed to Berlin its wish to

⁶³ Kari Nars, 'Suomen sodanaikainen talous ja talouspolitiikka', *Taloudellisia selvityksiä* 1966. Suomen Pankin taloustieteellisen tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja. Sarja A:29 (Helsinki, 1966), pp. 83–101; Artturi Lehtinen, 'Sotatalous 1939–1945', *i verkset Itsenäisen Suomen taloushistoriaa 1919–1950* (Porvoo, 1967), pp. 133–196.

⁶⁴ Michael Jonas, 'The Politics of an Alliance', in Kinnunen – Kivimäki (eds.), *Finland in World War II*, 2011, pp. 94–138.

⁶⁵ Jonas 2011, pp. 105, 135.

withdraw from the alliance as well as the war. The German dictator's patience was fostered by the seeming stability of the Finnish front, which had maintained its positions on the Karelian peninsula and the western coast of Lake Onega. In contrast to the Axis troops around Stalingrad, the Finns were spared the attention of the Red Army and therefore maintained their reputation among the Germans 'as the supposedly most formidable fighting force alongside Wehrmacht'.⁶⁶

Much of this prestige faded with the Soviet offensive of June 1944, which resulted in a chaotic retreat of the Finnish army on the Karelian peninsula and was stopped only after the Finnish defence received the support of the Luftwaffe and new German anti-tank weaponry. Despite this setback, the German historian Bernd Wegner does not hesitate to characterize Finland as Germany's most important military ally on the eastern front. In his estimation, this was due not only to the strategic importance of the Finnish front, but also the relative professionalism of the Finnish conscript army, especially in the command, drill and motivation of its sixteen divisions. The Finnish army also had the advantage of fighting in a terrain that was very familiar to its soldiers and commanders; with lots of lakes, woods and marshes, but very few roads and open fields.⁶⁷

By the end of 1941, Finland's bitter experiences from the Winter War, which had strongly motivated both its leadership as well as its soldiers, had largely dissipated. Food shortage on the home front also took a toll, but at no stage in the war did the Finnish population lose heart or display any open sign of dissatisfaction with either their leadership or their German allies. A clear sign of this co-operative attitude was that the Social Democrats remained in the government throughout the war, while the communist-led resistance movement in Finland found almost no support. Such a favourable situation was no doubt aided by the stability of the front, which maintained the gains made in 1941 until June 1944. At the same time, German material support to the Finnish home front and army kept local shortages concealed and shielded the population from the full costs of unrelenting warfare.⁶⁸

In the German-controlled northern half of Finland, the relationship between the Wehrmacht and the Finnish civilian population was largely trouble free. German and Austrian troops were provided with sufficient food and other material resources which, in stark contrast

⁶⁶ Jonas 2011, p. 136.

⁶⁷ Bernd Wegner, 'Das Kriegsende in Skandinavien', in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 8* (Munich, 2007), pp. 963–72.

⁶⁸ Meinander 2009, pp. 9–43.

to German-controlled Eastern Europe, developed into a mutually beneficial situation for the civilian population, who profited considerably from the trade with, and services offered to, the Wehrmacht. Meanwhile, the passive warfare on this northern flank (up until the autumn of 1944), allowed the German troops, and their foreign forced labourers, time to improve the infrastructure of Lapland, which left a lasting impression on the landscape even despite the destruction caused by the Wehrmacht's retreat and scorched-earth policy at the end of the war. Overall, it is fair to claim that Finland, for a variety of reasons, suffered significantly less from joining Hitler's war in the east than Germany's other allies.⁶⁹

Finland's involvement in this conflict – which among the population came to be known as the Continuation War – ended in September 1944 when the country withdrew from the German alliance and signed an armistice treaty with the Soviet Union and Great Britain (the latter had declared war on Finland in December 1941). The peace conditions were even harsher than after the Winter War. But unlike the other Eastern European countries, which had been occupied two or even three times during the war, Finland had once again been able to ward off the Red Army. It was, therefore, able to restore its democratic institutions and capitalist economy with relative ease.

How much was this postwar development a consequence of the military alliance with Germany? Not surprisingly, this has been publicly debated countless times in Finland. Until recently, many public figures – including the social democrat Taro Halonen, president of Finland from 2000 to 2012 – have maintained that Finland fought its own defensive war and that Finns therefore 'were not indebted for this to others'. However, such a view is no longer dominant among professional historians and the younger generation of Finns.⁷⁰ Indisputably, Finland was heavily dependent on German support throughout the war years from 1941 to 1944. Equally incontestable is the fact that the sixteen Finnish divisions that participated in the war were crucial in enabling the Germans to take control of the Baltic Sea and the Arctic region. This perhaps explains why Hitler showed such extraordinary flexibility towards Finland, even after the Finns, as required by the Armistice Treaty, turned their weapons on the Germans in Lapland in September 1944.

⁶⁹ Meinander 2009, pp. 255–82; Marianne Junnila, 'Wars on the Home Front: Mobilization, Economy and Everyday Experiences' in Kinnunen – Kivimäki (eds.), *Finland in World War II*, 2011, pp. 191–232.

⁷⁰ Meinander, 'A Separate Story?', 2011, pp. 67–75; Pilvi Torsti, *Suomalaiset ja historia* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2012), pp. 141–55.

2 Romania

Dennis Deletant

Romania was driven into alliance with Nazi Germany by fear of the Soviet Union. 'Nothing could put Romania on Germany's side', remarked a member of the Romanian Foreign Ministry to the British Minister Sir Reginald Hoare in March 1940, 'except the conviction that only Germany could keep the Soviets out of Romania'.¹ That conviction was quick to form after the collapse of France in May 1940, the Soviet seizure from Romania of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina at the end of June, and the loss of northern Transylvania to Hungary under the Vienna Award in late August. One third of Romania's 1939 area was ceded in 1940 and with it Romania's population fell from 19.9 million to 13.3 million. The loss of the three territories led King Carol II to accept Hitler's frontier guarantee, one which he gave only after Carol's agreement to the Vienna Award.

In a broader sense, Romania's alliance with Germany between 1940 and 1944 was generated by the disintegration of the European order established after the First World War and by the threat posed by the Soviet Union to Romania's territorial integrity.² That threat became reality when Romania bowed to a Soviet ultimatum, issued on 26 June 1940, for the annexation of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina on pain of the use of force.

The First World War had given Romania a chance to gain the predominantly Romanian-populated province of Transylvania, then under Hungarian rule, and the region of Bukovina³ which Austria had acquired in 1775. The Allied Powers offered both territories to Romania in return for her entry into the war on the side of the Entente. This she did in August

¹ Maurice Pearton, 'British Policy towards Romania 1939–1941' in Dennis Deletant and Maurice Pearton, *Romania Observed* (Bucharest: Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1998), p. 95.

² For this chapter I draw in part on my own study of the Antonescu regime published as *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania, 1940–1944* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) (hereafter *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*).

³ Although Romanians represented less than 30 per cent of the inhabitants in the province.

1916, and it says much about the strength of character of King Ferdinand that he signed a declaration of war against his country of birth. Romania was duly rewarded at the Paris Peace Conference with Transylvania and Bukovina, despite her defection from the war in April 1918 when she was forced to sign a peace treaty with Germany. Two months earlier Romanian troops, profiting from the disintegration of the Russian army in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, had occupied the province of Bessarabia, annexed by Russia in 1812. The union of Bessarabia with Romania, proclaimed by representatives of the Romanian majority in the province on 27 March 1918, was confirmed by the Paris Peace Treaties. It was not, however, accepted by the Soviet Union.

The enlarged Romanian state, *România Mare* (Great Romania), encompassed virtually all ethnic Romanians. It also included, however, significant Slav, German, Hungarian and Bulgarian minorities. By the same token, Romania's leaders linked the integrity of her new borders to the maintenance of, and respect for, the new international order consecrated by the Peace Settlement. Defence of the European status quo thus became the cornerstone of interwar foreign policy pursued by all Romanian governments until the Munich agreement of 1938. There were three bases to this policy: alliance with the other post-1919 states which shared a common interest with Romania in opposing frontier revision; collaboration with France, the strongest Western continental military power; and support for, and participation in, the League of Nations which guaranteed the territorial integrity of its members.

These three features of Romanian foreign policy were harmonized by Nicolae Titulescu. In doing so he demonstrated that a small country's interests can be defended just as effectively with accomplished diplomacy as with military power. On being appointed Foreign Minister in October 1932, Titulescu's experience of, and faith in, the League guided his hand in his conduct of Romanian policy – he had been elected President of the 11th Ordinary Session of the League on 10 September 1930 and reelected in 1931. Convinced that his country's security was dependent on the maintenance of international order, he sought to consolidate the Little Entente, formed in 1921 by Romania with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as a deterrent against Hungarian revisionism. 'Revisionism means war' became a catchphrase of Titulescu, uttered with increasing frequency after the rise of Hitler who advocated revision of the Versailles treaties. Hitler's challenge to the status quo encouraged Hungary to press its claims to Transylvania and it was to counter the danger posed by Hitler to European peace that Titulescu now took action. He advocated the creation of a system of collective security based on France and the Soviet Union, and it was he who helped to bring about the mutual assistance

pact between Moscow and Paris in May 1935. Titulescu hoped that this agreement would form the nucleus of a large coalition of anti-revisionist states to hold Hitler in check and to this end he took Romania down the road to alliance with the Soviet Union.

The main stumbling block to such an alliance was the Bessarabian question. Soviet intransigence mollified sufficiently for Moscow to sign the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928 which outlawed war as an instrument of national policy. On the initiative of the Soviet government, a supplementary protocol was signed in Moscow on 9 February 1929, by which the Soviet Union and its western neighbours, including Romania, agreed to put the pact into effect at once, without waiting for the other states to ratify it. In June 1934, an exchange of letters between Titulescu and Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Commissar for Foreign Relations, marked the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries and paved the way for Titulescu to seek a defensive alliance with the Soviet Union. Consequently, in September 1935 Titulescu began discussions with Litvinov over the conclusion of a Soviet-Romanian Treaty of Mutual Assistance.

The international situation, however, turned against him. Titulescu's condemnation of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in the autumn of 1935 and of the German occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, as violations of the Covenant of the League of Nations, made him an enemy of both these states and led Mussolini to call for his dismissal. To add to Titulescu's problems, the Rhineland occupation exposed France's weakness. It denied French forces easy access to the Danube, which underwrote Romania's security, and caused Romanian politicians to question the wisdom of pursuing an alliance with the Soviet Union which, because of the feebleness of France, might bring Romania into dependence on her powerful eastern neighbour. Titulescu was himself aware of this danger and therefore when he and Litvinov agreed, on 21 July 1936, upon the general principles of the Soviet-Romanian pact, the question of its subordination to the Franco-Soviet alliance was the only article that divided the two foreign ministers; Titulescu argued that the pact should come into force only if France acted on the Franco-Soviet Treaty, but Litvinov disagreed. Titulescu was unable to extract from Litvinov *de jure* recognition of Romania's sovereignty over Bessarabia and before he could proceed further he was dismissed by King Carol II who shared his ministers' concern about a close association with the Soviet Union. Romanian foreign policy, with its principal pillar of France severely undermined and its architect of an accommodation with the Soviet Union removed, now sought to navigate its way between the competing interests of the Western allies and Germany.

The blows delivered by Mussolini and Hitler in 1936 to the prestige of the League of Nations, and to the principles of collective security and defence of the post-war territorial settlement, were only the first shocks to the European order upon which Romania had based its inter-war foreign policy. The event which shattered that order was the Munich agreement of 30 September 1938, as a result of which Hitler succeeded in imposing his own revision of European frontiers. The occupation of Prague in March 1939 allowed Germany, through its takeover of all Czechoslovak commercial and foreign investments, to extend its economic dominance throughout South-East Europe, a dominance which it had achieved through the *Anschluss* via the Austrian banking system. Romania's contracts with the Skoda arms company made Germany, at a stroke, Romania's principal arms supplier. Furthermore, since these arms were supplied from German-controlled Czechoslovakia, there was no need for Hitler to divert output to the Romanian army from German factories.⁴

During Carol's state visit to London in November 1938 he tried unsuccessfully to counter German economic influence by putting forward proposals to the British for assistance to Romania based on credits and investments, but the British did not consider these economically sound. On his way back to Romania, Carol visited Hitler in order to assure him of his country's equitable policy. The King wanted good commercial relations with Germany but was concerned about Germany's position regarding Hungarian claims to Transylvania. Hitler, too, was anxious to extend trade between the two countries, but remained evasive about the Transylvanian question, realizing that German support on this issue gave him a vital lever of influence over both Hungary and Romania. Carol also discussed with Field Marshal Göring proposals for long-term economic collaboration between Germany and Romania and in contrast to his failure with the British, found the Germans only too anxious to take matters further.⁵

Romania thus found itself in a position of uncertainty after Munich. The country was exposed to growing Hungarian pressure over Transylvania, was apprehensive of the Soviet Union's motives concerning Bessarabia, and, given the weakness of France, could no longer

⁴ This point is made by Mark Axworthy, Cornel Scafeş and Cristian Craciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally. Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941–1945* (London: Arms & Armour, 1995 (hereafter Axworthy, *Third Axis*), p. 38.

⁵ Carol's discussions with the British and Germans are analysed in Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany, 1936–40* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 57–8; see also Dov B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers 1933–1940* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 142–4.

rely on the security of the Little Entente. Defenceless against German pressure, King Carol sought to come to an accommodation with Hitler by making economic concessions. This shift in policy, discernible following the Munich Agreement, was confirmed by the appointment of Grigore Gafencu as Foreign Minister in December 1938. He was determined to pursue a German guarantee of Romania's territorial integrity in return for Romanian economic concessions.⁶ Hence, in February 1939, Helmuth Wohlthat went to Bucharest to open negotiations on a German-Romanian economic agreement. In order to strengthen the Romanian bargaining position Gafencu, using a decision in February of the British government to follow up Carol's November visit by sending a limited economic mission to Romania, suggested to the Germans that Britain was a serious rival to them. On 10 March, Wohlthat submitted new, tougher proposals which were tantamount to the subordination of Romanian industry and agriculture to the economic needs of Germany.⁷ Alarmed by the hardening of the German position, and by the entry of German troops into Prague on 15 March, Viorel Tilea, the Romanian ambassador to London, informed the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax on 17 March that his government had been asked to give Germany a monopoly of Romanian exports and to adapt industrial production in return for a guarantee of the country's borders. 'This', opined Tilea, 'seemed to the Romanian government something very much like an ultimatum'.⁸ Fearing that Germany would seize Romania's oil, both Britain and France gave guarantees to Romania on 13 April.⁹ The Anglo-French guarantee was, as Carol and Gafencu had wished, a unilateral guarantee. It obliged the West to protect Romania against aggression provided Romania defended itself in the event of attack, but the Romanians were not bound to help Britain or France if attacked.¹⁰

The Anglo-French move was primarily political. German preponderance in Romanian affairs was confirmed by the signature on 23 March

⁶ R. Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, p.68.

⁷ D. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers*, p. 153.

⁸ For a discussion of this so-called 'ultimatum' see R. Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, pp. 77–8.

⁹ A. Chanady, J. Jensen, 'Germany, Rumania and the British Guarantees of March-April 1939', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (August 1970), pp. 201–17.

¹⁰ R. Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, pp. 78–9. The guarantee was also the result of French pressure on Britain to guarantee Romania as the price of France's willingness to help guarantee Greece: D. Cameron Watt, 'Misinformation, Misconception, Mistrust: Episodes in British Policy and the Approach of War, 1938–1939', in Michael Bentley and John Stevenson (eds.), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain: Ten Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 247–9. I am grateful to Rebecca Haynes for this reference.

of the German-Romanian economic treaty which bound the Romanian economy more closely to that of Germany and under the terms of which the Germans undertook to supply the Romanian armed forces with arms and equipment and to provide assistance to Romania in cultivating food-stuffs and oilseeds, and in establishing new industries for processing agricultural products, all of which were of interest to the German economy. As far as possible, Romania 'struggled to keep the Reich from obtaining too favourable a rate of exchange and to retain as large a share as possible of its exports for the free world market'.¹¹ The agreement did not prevent Gafencu from professing his continued faith in a policy of neutrality or 'equilibrium', as he liked to term it, in a speech before the Chamber of Deputies in Bucharest on 29 June 1939:

It is a principle with us not to seek the support of one of the two great neighbouring Powers in turning against the other, in order to give no pretext for conflict on our frontiers or on our territory. This principle is of service to our interest, to those of our neighbours, and to the general interests of peace. A strong and independent Romania is, for the States that surround us, a guarantee of security.¹²

The maintenance of that 'equilibrium' rested on the tension between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, for the states of Eastern Europe represented a buffer zone between the two great dictatorships and the status quo of the area was dependent on the mutual suspicion felt by Hitler and Stalin. That status quo, the underpinning of Romanian policy, was shattered by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of Non-Aggression, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact after the names of the German and Soviet foreign ministers who signed it on 23 August 1939. Through the Pact Hitler claimed to have 'definitely sealed' the peace between the German Reich and the Soviet Union by establishing 'precisely and for all time' the respective zones of interest of the two Powers. The Pact introduced a new order in Europe, one subject not to international deliberation and ratification, but to the interests which the two partners considered they had the right to claim and impose.

Hardly had the ink dried on the document before first Hitler, on 1 September, and then Stalin, sixteen days later, attacked Poland and partitioned it. With Poland on its knees, the government and army command withdrew to Romania where King Carol had given a promise of sanctuary. During the early hours of the morning of 18 September, Marshal Edward Smigly-Rydz, the head of the Polish armed forces, crossed the

¹¹ Henry Roberts, *Rumania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1951), pp. 215–16 where he analyses the terms.

¹² Grigore Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign* (London: Frederick Muller, 1945), p. 237.

Czeremosz (Ceremuş) bridge onto Romanian territory and was eventually placed in confinement in Craiova as a result of German pressure. The Romanian government allowed seventy tons of gold belonging to the Bank of Poland to reach the port of Constanţa where it was loaded into a ship and transferred to France via Syria.¹³ President Ignacy Moscicki was sent to Bicaz and other members of the government to isolated localities such as Slanic and Băile Herculane.¹⁴ They were joined by some 26,000 Polish citizens, 15,000 of whom were civilians, according to Romanian archival sources.¹⁵

On 30 November 1939, the Soviet Union attacked Finland. Finland's defeat in the middle of March 1940 added further weight to those in the Romanian government who advocated still greater ties with Germany as a guarantee against attacks on their territorial integrity. At the same time, the provisions of the German-Romanian economic treaty of 23 March 1939 were beginning to be translated into action. Several German-Romanian companies for the exploitation of Romania's resources were founded.¹⁶ Gafencu still sought equilibrium. He urged the government to 'save by all our means our political and economic neutrality, and in the same way as we have managed for many months, not weaken our positions whether by imprudent or provocative words and attitudes towards Germany, or by unfriendly words and postures towards the Western Powers, or by renunciation of any valuable element of our independence'.¹⁷ But the re-opening of the issue of Bessarabia by the Soviets and events in Scandinavia took the ground from under his feet.

When first Molotov, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Relations, officially rekindled the Bessarabian question on 29 March 1940 by declaring before the Supreme Soviet that the Soviet Government had never recognized the occupation of the province by Romania, and second, the Germans invaded on 9 April Denmark and Norway (two more neutral countries which, like Romania, had tried to come to an understanding

¹³ See R. Westerby, R.M. Low, *The Polish Gold* (London: Methuen, 1940).

¹⁴ On 14 October 1939, Smigly-Ridz was moved to a village called Dragoslavele. He eventually escaped from his place of internment, at the third attempt, during the night of 15–16 December 1940 and crossed into Hungary, before making his way back clandestinely to Poland. Details from Stanley S. Seidner, 'Reflections from Rumania and beyond: Marshal Smigly-Rydz in exile', *The Polish Review*, vol. 22 (1977), no. 2, 29–51.

¹⁵ *Refugiații polonezi în România 1939–1947. Documente din Arhivele Naționale ale României. Polscy uchodźcy w Rumunii 1939–1947. Dokumenty z Narodowych archiwów Rumunii*. 2 vols. Warsaw-Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, Institutul Memoriei Naționale – Comisia pentru Condamnarea Crimelor Împotriva Națiunii Poloneze, 2013.

¹⁶ These were later to provide the model and precedent advanced by the Soviets for the establishment of the joint Soviet-Romanian companies provided for in the Soviet-Romanian Armistice of September 1944.

¹⁷ G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 222.

with Hitler), many Romanians felt that the writing was on the wall. King Carol's neutrality was becoming more precarious under the impact of German military success and Soviet pressure, and also because of Anglo-French efforts to disrupt oil supplies to Germany by acts of sabotage on the Danube which constituted an infringement of Romania's neutrality. The bungling of these attempts in April, made with the acquiescence of some members of the Romanian General Staff, compromised the Romanians in German eyes and exposed them to the risk of an invasion against which the British and French were powerless, in Romanian eyes, to provide help.¹⁸

The French, nevertheless, did contemplate military aid. At the end of March General Weygand, commander of French forces in the eastern Mediterranean, sent a representative to Bucharest to sound out the Romanians about the possibility of sending a French expeditionary air force. This project was vague and uncoordinated with the British. The French troops were in Syria and the Turkish Government was disinclined to allow them to cross Turkey. The logistical problems were horrendous. The whole idea alarmed the Romanian General Staff who feared that the Germans would act preemptively against them. Gafencu responded by reassuring the Germans that he would resist all Anglo-French efforts to draw Romania into the war and that the Germans need not invade Romania to secure their supplies of oil.¹⁹

The German offensive in the West on 10 May 1940 against Holland and Belgium, in violation of their neutrality, radically changed King Carol's assessment of his position and marked the end of Romania's own neutrality. The choice was no longer between Germany and the Western Powers. The rapid German victories in Holland, Belgium and France stunned the Romanians who regarded every defeat for the Allies as an argument for closer association with Germany. From the middle of May, Hungary and the Soviet Union began deploying troops along their borders with Romania and the Romanian High Command responded in kind. Bereft of any hope of Anglo-French help against his neighbours' territorial pretensions, King Carol turned decidedly towards Germany.

On 15 May, he told Wilhelm Fabricius, the German ambassador to Bucharest, that 'Romania's future depended solely upon Germany' and five days later Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu let Fabricius know that Romania was ready to align its foreign policy with Germany in return for an assurance of protection against Russia.²⁰ On 24 May, Baron

¹⁸ M. Pearton, 'British Policy towards Romania 1939–1941', pp. 539–47.

¹⁹ D. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers*, p. 223.

²⁰ R. Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, p. 130.

Manfred von Killinger, Hitler's special envoy to Bucharest, had a meeting with Colonel Mihai Moruzov, head of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SSI). Killinger's mission was to follow the activity of the British Secret Service in South-East Europe and Moruzov was a person with whom he felt he could collaborate.²¹ The opinions expressed by Killinger to Moruzov were his own and no instructions had been given to him to bring them to the attention of the Romanian government. Yet given his status, he must have known that they would be passed on by Moruzov to Carol. Killinger recognized that:

there is, on the one hand, a climate of opinion which is very favourable to Britain and France since the abiding conviction is that the creation of Greater Romania [Romania post-1918] is due exclusively to these countries and that, in the future, the fate of Romania will also be in the hands of the allies. On the other hand, there is an atmosphere which is unfavourable to close relations with Germany, either because of memories of the last war, or because of certain intentions which are attributed today to Germany.

I am convinced, however, the reality is different. In the first place, although Britain and France perhaps contributed to the national claims of Romania, I see no possibility of their helping Romania today. On the contrary, by entering a war alongside the allies, Romania can only lose out. Romania is today surrounded by enemies: Hungary, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union. If it can deal with the first two on its own, there is no way it can cope with the Bolshevik torrent.

.....

Germany considers that there are two enemies. Enemy number 1: The allies who will attack the oil fields and installations from the air from bases in Greece or Turkey, from a distance of two or three hours' flying time. Enemy number 2: the Soviet Union which, in order to realize the pan-Slav idea, will attack Romania not only to retake Bessarabia, but in order to unite with the Slavs in the Balkan peninsula. In this scenario Romania will be devastated, including the oil fields, of course, if these have not already been destroyed by the Romanians. Obviously, in both cases, Romania will not be able to offer resistance for long. The only course is for the conclusion of an official bond with Germany which is both correct and certain, and which is the only one which can absolutely guarantee Romania's territorial integrity.²²

On 28 May, Tătărescu informed Fabricius that its friendly relations with Germany were 'based on active collaboration with Germany in all domains' and expressed 'the hope of the Romanian government that the framework of friendly collaboration with the government of the Reich

²¹ Killinger recounted this meeting with Moruzov to Gheorghe Barbul, a Romanian diplomat, on 22 March 1943; see Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale [The Central Historical National Archives, Bucharest], henceforth ANIC, Ministerul Afacerilor Interne [Ministry of Internal Affairs]. Trial of Ion Antonescu, file 40010, vol. 28, p. 293.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 293–7.

would be extended'.²³ He drew the Reich's attention to the recent concentrations by its neighbours of troops on Romania's frontiers which threatened the peace of the region. The German reply of 2 June was a momentous blow. Instead of offering advice, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, asked the Romanians whether they would be ready to make territorial concessions to their neighbours, particularly to the Russians.²⁴ Carol was taken aback. While expressing willingness to enter into discussions with the Soviet Union over the conclusion of a pact of non-aggression, Carol was unwilling to consider the cession of Bessarabia and underlined this by stressing, through Tătărescu on 20 June, the importance for Germany of a strong Romanian state, guardian of the river Dniester and of the mouths of the Danube.²⁵

What Carol did not know, of course, was that Germany had already recognized the Soviet claim to Bessarabia in the supplementary secret annex to the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Article 3 of the annex read: 'with regard to South-Eastern Europe, the Soviet side emphasizes its interest in Bessarabia; the German side declares complete political *désintéressement* in these territories.'²⁶ Hitler's magnanimity in conceding the Soviet interest in Bessarabia was founded on an optimistic assessment of German power and Soviet weakness in South-Eastern Europe, a view reflected in the prediction made by the German military attaché in Bucharest in December 1939 that 'the Russians will not occupy Bessarabia as long as Germany is strong enough. However, should we suffer a serious setback, or have all our forces engaged, Russia might take advantage of a rare opportunity which might not occur for a long time.'²⁷ The accuracy of the attaché's forecast was borne out by events. Shortly before midnight on 26 June 1940, when German forces were completing their victorious sweep through France, Molotov summoned the Romanian ambassador in Moscow Davidescu to the Kremlin and presented an ultimatum demanding that Romania should cede Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union. The Soviet note called for a reply from the Romanian government within 24 hours. The Romanians appealed to the Germans for help but Berlin responded by advising

²³ Valeriu Pop, *Bătălia pentru Ardeal [The Battle for Transylvania]* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1992), p. 253.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 255; see also D. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers*, pp. 229–30.

²⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945, Series D (1937–1945)* (henceforth cited as *DGFP*), vol. VII (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), doc. no. 229, p. 247.

²⁷ M.G. Hitchens, *Germany, Russia and the Balkans. Prelude to the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1983), p. 221.

Bucharest to accept the conditions set by Moscow. Carol had before him the example of Poland where war against either the Soviet Union or Germany might lead to the intervention of the other and to the partition of the country. Most of the King's advisors were against resistance and he acceded to the Soviet demands.

The Soviet ultimatum and the annexation of Romanian territory amounted to international blackmail. The threat to use force was a threat to commit acts outlawed by the two conventions for the Definition of Aggression, signed on 3 and 4 July 1933, to which both the Soviet Union and Romania were signatories.²⁸ Romania acquiesced in the Soviet demands in an exchange of notes. The new status of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, irrespective of all preceding legality, was therefore, from an international legal standpoint, based on a formal agreement contained in this exchange of notes, consenting to the retrocession of Bessarabia and the cession of northern Bukovina.²⁹ What was not consented to by the Romanian side was the Soviet Union's annexation of the district of Herța in northern Moldavia, for it was not mentioned in the text of the ultimatum, nor her occupation of four islands at the mouth of the Danube in autumn 1940.

Attached to the ultimatum was a small map on which the ceded territories were marked by a thick red line drawn in pencil. Not only did the thickness of the line cause confusion as to which localities fell on the Soviet side because it covered a seven-mile band on the map, but the roughness of the pencil stroke cut across the north-eastern corner of Moldavia and the town of Herța. Despite Romanian protests that this area was not mentioned in the ultimatum, the Soviet representatives on the Romanian-Soviet Commission established in Odessa to supervise its application insisted that the town, which hosted a strategic railway link, was part of the ceded areas and Soviet troops occupied it.

The frontier imposed upon Romania by the Soviet Union was by no means the ethnic line between Romanians and Ukrainians and the claim in the ultimatum that Bessarabia was principally peopled by Ukrainians was wildly inaccurate. Even the census taken in 1897 – while the province was under Russian rule – could not be adduced to bring the slightest support to the ultimatum's contention.³⁰ The Soviet claim to that

²⁸ W.W. Kulski, 'Soviet comments on international law and international relations', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 45 (July 1951), 558–9.

²⁹ M.W. Graham, 'The Legal Status of the Bukovina and Bessarabia', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 38 (1944), 671.

³⁰ Based on language affiliation, the figures gave the numbers of Romanians as 920,919 (47.6%), of Ukrainians as 382,169 (19.7%), and of Russians as 155,774 (8.05%) (*Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiskoi Imperii 1897g.*, vol. 3, St Petersburg, 1905). By 1930, the population breakdown, according to the Romanian census, was

part of Bukovina 'where the predominant majority of the population is connected with the Soviet Ukraine by common historical destinies' was less spurious despite its formulation which invited the charge of writing history backwards. Although Bukovina had never formed part of the Russian Empire, and its total population, according to the 1930 Romanian census, contained a majority of Romanians,³¹ in the northern part demanded by the Soviet Union there was an absolute Ukrainian majority.³²

The total area ceded by Romania to the Soviet Union covered 50,762 square kilometres and contained a population of 3,776,000, of whom more than half, 2,020,000, were Romanian.³³ Romanian losses in men and equipment were communicated to London by the British military attaché, Lt-Col Geoffrey Macnab. He concluded that the 'withdrawal

as follows: Romanians 1,610,752 (56.2%), Russians 351,912 (12.3%), Ukrainians 314,211 (11%), Jews 204,858 (7.2%) and Bulgarians 163,726 (5.7%) (*Anuarul statistic al României 1939 și 1940* [*The Statistical Yearbook of Romania 1939 and 1940*] (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940), p. 60.

³¹ The total number was 853,009 of whom 379,691 (44.5%) were Romanians; 236,130 (27.6%) were Ukrainians; 92,492 Jews (10.8%); 75,533 Germans (8.8%); and 30,580 Poles (3.5%). In his analysis of the population of the areas annexed by the Soviet Union in June 1940, Anton Golopenția shows that in eight districts of the counties of Rădăuți, Storojineț, Cernăuți and Hotin, which constituted most of the area of Northern Bukovina and the northern part of Bessarabia lost by Romania, Ukrainians represented an absolute majority of 67% of the population. The population by nationality of the eight districts, based on the 1930 census, is given as Ukrainians 301,271; Romanians 53,115; Russians 37,635; Jews 31,595 (Anton Golopenția, 'Populația teritoriilor românești desprinse în 1940', *Geopolitica și geoistoria*, no. 1, 1941, Bucharest: Societatea Română de Statistică, 1941, 10). In the two southern Bessarabian counties of Cetatea Alba and Ismail (the greater part of which were added to the Ukrainian SSR) the Ukrainians, however, represented only 14% compared with 24% for Romanians, 22% for Russians, and 20% for Bulgarians. If the figures for the other two southern Bessarabian counties of Tighina and Cahul are entered into the calculation (and parts of them were incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR) the Ukrainian percentage drops to a mere 8% compared with the figure for Romanians of 37%; for Russians of 17%; for Bulgarians of 15%; for Gagauz of 9%; and for Jews of 3%. The figures are: Cetatea Albă 341,000 (Romanians 63,000, Ukrainians 70,000, Bulgarians 71,000, Russians 59,000, Jews 11,000, Gagauz 8,000); Cahul 197,000 (Romanians 101,000, Ukrainians 619, Bulgarians 29,000, Russians 15,000, Jews 4,000, Gagauz 35,000); Ismail 225,000 (Romanians 72,000, Ukrainians 11,000, Bulgarians 43,000, Russians 67,000, Jews 6,000, Gagauz 16,000); and Tighina 307,000 (Romanians 164,000, Ukrainians 9,000, Bulgarians 20,000, Russians 45,000, Jews 17,000, Gagauz 39,000) (*Anuarul statistic al României 1939 și 1940* [Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940], p. 60).

³² The breakdown of county population figures for Bukovina, based on the 1930 Romanian census, was: Câmpulung 94,816; Cernăuți 306,194; Rădăuți 160,778; Storojineț 169,894; Suceava 121,327 (*Anuarul statistic al României 1939 și 1940* [Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940], p. 60).

³³ Anton Golopenția, 'Populația teritoriilor românești desprinse în 1940' [The Population of the Romanian Territories Amputated in 1940], *Geopolitica și geoistoria*, no. 1, 1941 (Bucharest: Societatea Română de Statistică, 1941), pp. 37–38.

was in general very poorly executed and many units never received orders'. As a result, there had been 'about 75 court-martials of officers for cowardice and inefficiency', the only details of which to emerge were the dismissal of the Commander of the 21st division, and the reduction to half-pay of the Minister of Defence.³⁴ Fearful of what might befall them under Soviet rule, most of the Romanians took the painful decision to leave with the Romanian troops but, because of the short deadline given by the Soviets for the withdrawal of the Romanian army, they were forced to abandon their belongings. Even with the possessions they had, some of the Romanian refugees were attacked by armed groups of local Communists and robbed.

In the changed power configuration of 1940, the Soviet Union felt able to disregard the Romanian frontiers agreed by the Allies at the Paris Peace settlement. Stalin looked to improve his defence position against Germany before Hitler made Romania a client state and advanced his defence line to the Prut. But the rapacious and cynical manner in which the Soviet Union exercised its claim to Bessarabia and northern Bukovina drove Romania into Germany's arms by leading King Carol to fear that Stalin might encroach further upon Romanian soil. He therefore quickly declared Romania's solidarity with Germany before obtaining a guarantee from Hitler of his country's territorial integrity.

On 1 July, the Romanian government renounced the Anglo-French guarantee, its membership of the Balkan Entente and of the League of Nations, and Carol informed Fabricius, the German ambassador in Bucharest, of his desire for a political agreement with the Reich, telling him that without German protection, 'Romania is incapable of any action and is subject to Soviet Russian influence.'³⁵ The following day, the King requested that a German military mission be sent to Romania

³⁴ The National Archives, Kew, War Office 208/1745, 'Balkan Invasion: Russian Invasion of Roumania', 30 July 1940. 'Of 7 Infantry and 3 Cavalry Divisions located on territory now occupied by Russians, 3 Infantry and 1 Cavalry Division lost everything; 2 Infantry and 1 Cavalry Division [lost] 50 to 70 per cent of all war materiel, remainder no loss. These losses include literally everything since units concerned were composed of Bessarabian troops who made off home leaving weapons behind and taking horses and carts with them. Casualties: Officers (?16) dead, 23 missing; Warrant Officers 49 dead, 416 missing; Other Ranks unknown, but since in addition to deserters all men of Bessarabian origin are allowed to return home, I estimate loss to army at least 150,000 men' (I am grateful to the late Brigadier-General Geoffrey Macnab for these details); see also Larry Watts, *Romanian Cassandra. Ion Antonescu and the Struggle for Reform, 1916-1941* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1993), p. 233.

³⁵ Rebecca Haynes, 'Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State, September 1940', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 77 (October 1999), 702.

to help train the Romanian army and air force.³⁶ On 4 July 1940, Romania joined the Berlin-Rome Axis. Hitler now cleverly exploited his position. In a letter of 13 July, he reminded Carol of his acceptance of the Anglo-French guarantee and made German protection conditional upon the settlement of the outstanding territorial disputes with Hungary and Bulgaria over Transylvania and Dobrogea which the cession of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina had triggered off.

At the height of the crisis over the Soviet ultimatum Carol had called in the German minister von Killinger to protest at the pressure being placed upon him, not only by the Russians, but also by the Hungarians and Bulgarians:

I fully realize that Germany can give me no support against Russia but one thing she can do, and one act of friendship is worth another – for the oil has continued to flow without interruption precisely during your Western offensive – namely call off Hungary and Bulgaria.³⁷

Hungary's revisionist ambitions were closely linked with those of the Third Reich. Like Hitler, Hungary's leaders had never accepted the 'injustices' of the Paris Peace Settlement and therefore Hitler's advocacy of revision of the Versailles Treaty encouraged Hungary to press its claims to lost territories. The first success of Hungary's pro-German policy was gained in November 1938 when, under the terms of the First Vienna Award, Hungary acquired part of southern Slovakia from Czechoslovakia. In March 1939, it was awarded Carpatho-Ruthenia and then concentrated its attention on Transylvania. Hungarian strategy was to coordinate the claim to Transylvania with Soviet agitation over Bessarabia. A month after the issue of Bessarabia was raised in the Soviet press, the Hungarian chief of staff, General Henrik Werth, advised his government in a memorandum dated 12 December 1939 that in the case of a Soviet attack on Romania, Hungary should act to recover 'the whole of Transylvania'. He also instructed General Gabor Faragho, the Hungarian military attaché in Moscow, to discuss with the Soviet authorities the possibility of a coordinated attack against Romania.³⁸ Not content with its amputation of Romania by annexing Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in June 1940, the Soviet Union backed Hungary's claims to Transylvania. On 11 July, the Hungarian ambassador to Moscow sent a report to Budapest of a discussion he had had with Molotov during which the Soviet Foreign Minister had made clear that the USSR considered Hungary's territorial

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *DGFP*, vol. IX, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956, doc. no. 67, p. 69.

³⁸ C.A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth. A History of Modern Hungary, 1929–1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1956), vol. 1, pp. 336–87.

demands towards Romania to be justified, and offered its support for them should a conference be called to resolve them.³⁹

Hitler's stance over Transylvania was dictated by his need for stability in preparing Operation Barbarossa which was conceived with Romanian participation, but not Hungarian, in mind. Whilst warning the Hungarian Prime Minister on 10 July not to expect any help from Germany should Hungary attack Romania, Hitler was worried about a joint Russian-Hungarian move against Romania which would threaten the oil fields and thus endanger his plans in Russia. He therefore offered Germany's services as mediator and negotiations between Hungary and Romania began on 10 August at Turnu-Severin. After ten days of stalemate Hitler imposed a settlement. The German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his Italian counterpart, Count Galeazzo Ciano, invited both sides to Vienna and told them to accept the result of their arbitration.

On the question of the future of Transylvania, Romanians were virtually unanimous that it was in political, cultural and economic terms more important to the cohesion of the Romanian state than Bessarabia, notwithstanding the painful consequences of the loss of the province. This view was conveyed by Ion Gigurtu, the Romanian prime minister, in a letter to Ribbentrop on 27 August 1940. Gigurtu explained that while Romanian public opinion had recognized the need to accept the Soviet ultimatum over Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, on German advice, in order to avoid war with the Soviet Union, the cession of part of Transylvania was a completely different matter. 'Transylvania', he wrote, 'was always considered by us as a fortress of Romanianism, in which our nation ... developed.' The decision to cede Bessarabia had been taken, he argued, in order to deflect revisionist claims on Transylvania where the Romanians 'have lived for eighteen centuries'.⁴⁰

Carol and his ministers were concerned that rejection of arbitration would lead to a Hungarian attack and German occupation of the oil fields, which might in turn provoke a Russian invasion of eastern Romania. The King convened a Crown Council in which members of the Iron Guard, and other pro-German ministers were now present, and it

³⁹ Ottmar Trașcă, 'URSS și diferendul româno-maghiar din vara anului 1940' [The USSR and the Romanian-Hungarian Dispute in Summer 1940], *România și relațiile internaționale în secolul XX în onoare Profesorului Universitar Doctor Vasile Vesa* [Romania and international relations in the 20th Century in honour of Professor Vasile Vesa], ed. by Liviu Țirău and Virgiliu Țărău (Cluj-Napoca: Biblioteca Centrală Universitară, 2000), p. 192.

⁴⁰ Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe [Archive for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Bucharest, Fond 71/Germania, vol. 80, pp. 129–34. I am grateful to Rebecca Haynes for providing this citation and reference.

voted nineteen to ten with one abstention for the acceptance of arbitration. Those against preferred defeat to disgrace, those in favour stressed the need to prevent the complete disintegration of Romania. Carol cast his vote with the latter.

Ribbentrop was instrumental in drawing up the terms of the award and he was driven by German strategic interests in doing so. By pushing the border of Hungary, which at this time was more closely linked to Germany than Romania, to the southeast Carpathian ridge, he gave the German army a natural defensive wall. At the same time, the new frontier ran only a few kilometres from the Romanian oilfields around Ploiești, which were vital to Hitler's plan to attack the Soviet Union.⁴¹ On the announcement of the Ribbentrop-Ciano adjudication on 30 August 1940, Mihail Manoilescu, the Romanian Foreign Minister, fainted on the table.⁴² Under the terms of the Second Vienna Award, as it came to be known, Transylvania was virtually partitioned. Hungary received an area of roughly 43,000 square kilometres in the north of the province representing roughly 40 per cent of its area and a population of 2.6 million.⁴³

The Bulgarian claim was settled without controversy. Southern Dobrogea, an area of almost 7,000 square kilometres where only about 25 per cent of the population was Romanian, was returned to Bulgaria under an agreement signed on 21 August and ratified by the treaty of Craiova on 7 September. The return was accompanied by an exchange of population: Romanian subjects of Bulgarian origin in the counties of Tulcea and Constanța in northern Dobrogea were transferred to Durostor and Caliacra in southern Dobrogea, while the Romanians in the latter counties were moved in their place. Bulgaria also undertook

⁴¹ R. Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, p. 158.

⁴² Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries 1939–1943*, tr. and ed. Hugh Gibson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1946), p. 289.

⁴³ One Romanian source gave the area ceded as 43,591 sq. km and the breakdown of population in northern Transylvania at the time of the award as 1,305,000 Romanians, 968,000 Hungarians, 149,000 Jews, and 72,000 Germans. (Silviu Dragomir, *La Transylvanie avant et après l'Arbitrage de Vienne* (Sibiu, 1943), p. 43). Another put the area at 42,610 sq. km in which there were 1,315,500 Romanians and 969,000 Hungarians as well as other nationalities (Anton Golopenția, 'Populația teritoriilor românești desprinse în 1940', *Geopolitică și geoistoria*, no. 1, 1941 (Bucharest: Societatea Română de Statistică, 1941, 39–40)). Compare this with the Hungarian of census of 1941, taken after an exodus of Romanians to southern Transylvania, which put the population of northern Transylvania by language at 2,577,000, of whom 1,347,000 were listed as Hungarians, 1,066,000 as Romanians, 47,500 as German speakers, and 45,600 as Yiddish speakers. Of the total Jewish population of about 200,000 of the province before the partition, 164,000 lived in the area ceded to Hungary. (*Genocide and Retribution: The Holocaust in Hungarian-ruled Transylvania*, ed. by Randolph L. Braham (Boston, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983), p. 10.)

to compensate the departing Romanians for their loss of property.⁴⁴ According to the figures of the joint Romanian-Bulgarian commission for the transfer, 103,711 Romanians were moved from southern Dobrogea and 62,278 Bulgarians settled from northern Dobrogea.⁴⁵

In return for these territorial concessions Carol obtained Hitler's guarantee of protection but it was for the Romania truncated at the behest of Hitler and it was too late to save his throne. One third of Romania's 1939 area was amputated in 1940 and with it Romania's population fell from 19.9 million to 13.3 million.⁴⁶ In economic terms, the territorial losses were crippling: 37 per cent of the arable land; 44 per cent of the forest land; 27 per cent of the orchards; and 37 per cent of the vineyards. Of the area given over to wheat (as of 1939) Romania lost 37 per cent; to maize 30 per cent; to sunflower 75 per cent; to hemp 43 per cent; and to soya 86 per cent.⁴⁷

On a human scale, the loss of a population of whom half – some 3 million – were ethnically Romanian, was too much for most Romanians to stomach. Protests organized on 3 September by the anti-Semitic Iron Guard – which had never forgiven Carol for the assassination in November 1938 of its leader Corneliu Codreanu – led to the seizure of government buildings. Fearing a breakdown of order Wilhelm Fabricius, the German Minister in Bucharest, informed Berlin on 5 September that he had advised General Ion Antonescu, a former Minister of War, to demand dictatorial powers from the King.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ The area represented almost 7% of the total area of Romania and had a population of 378,000 according to the 1930 census. Of these 143,000 (37.5%) were Bulgarian, 129,000 (34.1%) were Turkish-speaking Tatars, and 78,000 (20.5%) Romanian. However, under the terms of the Romanian-Turkish Convention of 4 September 1936, some 14,500 Romanians and almost 7,000 Macedo-Romanians were settled from Turkey on the land of 70,000 Turks in Dobrogea who opted to go to Turkey. This settlement brought the number of persons registered as Romanian in 1940 to 98,619. To this figure must be added the natural growth in population over the decade since 1930 (Anton Golopenția, 'Populația teritoriilor românești desprinse în 1940', p. 39). The transfer of population began on 5 November 1940 and was largely completed by 14 December.

⁴⁵ Dorel Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu*, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 93–5. In a selfish act, which provided eloquent testimony to his priorities, Carol, in the knowledge that Romania would cede southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria, was reported to have 'sold the Balcic castle [located there] to the Bucharest City Council in order to avoid a personal loss' (Quoted from Larry Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, p. 228).

⁴⁶ By contrast, Hungary's population grew from about 9 million in 1939 to an estimated 14.7 million in 1941, including almost 1 million Romanians (Mark Axworthy, *Third Axis*, p. 17.)

⁴⁷ Henry Roberts, *Rumania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), pp. 219–20.

⁴⁸ *DGFP*, vol. XI, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960, doc. no.17, p.22.

We should not infer from this that the Antonescu regime was imposed by Germany. In fact, Antonescu's rise to power was brought about not by Fabricius but by 'German-friendly' elements among the ministers and royal councillors who surrounded the King.⁴⁹ Those elements were encouraged by Fabricius.

In economic terms Romania was of vital importance to Hitler's war machine. At the time, the country possessed significant exploitable reserves of oil. As late as 1937 Germany's share in Romania's foreign trade was no greater than it had been in 1929.⁵⁰ It was the change in the European political balance, rather than direct economic penetration, which enabled an increase in Germany's influence to be more comprehensively realized. The *Anschluss* with Austria in March 1938 started the ball rolling south-eastwards and paved the way for German dominance of Romania's economy.⁵¹ This was sealed by the signature on 23 March 1939 of the Wohltat Agreement. This treaty and the oil agreement of May 1940 increased Germany's share of Romania's imports to 51 per cent and of her exports to 44 per cent in 1940.⁵²

The measures taken by the Germans to improve railway lines, to increase the number of locomotives and tankcars, and to improve loading and unloading facilities along the route between Romania and Germany, began to bear fruit in spring 1941, with the result that deliveries of oil to the Reich reached their height in 1941. After supplies had been interrupted by the freezing over of the Danube in the winter of 1940–1, and then again in April 1941, because of the destruction of bridges and the danger of mines, stocks of oil had reached record levels in Romania at Giurgiu on the Danube and Constanța on the Black Sea. From early summer exports of oil on a prodigious scale were resumed. Between July and October, some 500,000 tons of fuel were delivered to Germany. During the whole year 3.9 million tons of petroleum products were exported by Romania, of which 2.9 million went to Germany and

⁴⁹ Rebecca Haynes, 'Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State, September 1940', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 77 (October 1999), 711.

⁵⁰ For the figures see Henry Roberts, *Rumania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, p. 214, footnote 13. Romanian oil exports to Germany in the mid-1930s represented some 25 per cent of total exports to that country. (Călin-Radu Ancuța, 'Die deutsch-rumänischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen während der Kriegsjahre 1940–1944', *Modernisierung auf Raten in Rumänien. Anspruch, Umsetzung, Wirkung*, ed. by Krista Zach and Cornelius R. Zach (Munich: IKGS Verlag, 2004), p. 335.)

⁵¹ H. Roberts, *Rumania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, pp. 214–15.

⁵² Mark Axworthy, *Third Axis*, p. 21.

the German armies in Russia and in the Balkans. The rest was exported to Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.⁵³

Fabricius's advice to Antonescu illustrated most clearly the degree to which Romania had fallen within the orbit of Germany. Carol accepted Antonescu's demand and on 5 September granted Antonescu, who enjoyed the respect of the Army, unlimited powers in the hope of restoring order and saving his throne. The Iron Guard was not satisfied and called for the King's abdication. Antonescu was driven to echo the demand and on the following day Carol gave way in favour of his son King Michael. On the same day, the new king, Michael, issued a decree granting Antonescu unlimited powers as the Leader of the Romanian State (*Conducătorul Statului Român*), thereby relegating himself to the position of a ceremonial figure. A further decree, signed by Michael two days later, defined Antonescu's powers. The *Conducător* had the authority to initiate and promulgate all laws and to modify those already in force; to appoint and dismiss ministers; and to conclude treaties, declare war and make peace.⁵⁴

In order to govern Antonescu turned to the principal political parties but both the major democratic parties – the National Liberals and the National Peasants – refused to participate. He was therefore thrown back on the Iron Guard, sympathy for which had grown considerably following the disasters of the summer, and whose political profile had been given a major boost when Carol included it in the Gîruguţ government of 4 July.⁵⁵ A National Legionary State⁵⁶ was proclaimed on 14 September and in the cabinet formed on the following day Horia Sima, the leader of the Guard, was appointed Deputy Prime Minister. Five other ministries were given to Guard members, among them the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior. A distant relative, Mihai Antonescu, was made Minister of Justice.

Antonescu made an extremely favourable impression on Hitler when he met the Führer for the first time in Berlin on 21 November 1940, according to Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, despite the Romanian leader's two-hour rant against the Vienna Award.⁵⁷ He was not afraid to

⁵³ *Ibid.* According to Hillgruber 1,270,000 tons of petroleum products were exported by Romania to Germany in 1939, and 1,170,000 tons in 1940 (p. 161). Mark Axworthy (*Third Axis*, p. 190) gives higher figures: 1,556,000 tons for 1939, 1,304,800 for 1940, and 3,173,700 for 1941.

⁵⁴ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 476.

⁵⁵ Rebecca Haynes makes these points in her *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, p. 159.

⁵⁶ The Iron Guard was the paramilitary successor to the anti-Semitic 'Legion of the Archangel Michael', hence the adjective 'legionary'.

⁵⁷ Paul Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne, 1923–45; Erlebnisse des Chefdolmetschers im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas* (Bonn: Atheneum, 1949), pp. 511–12. One must bear in mind that Antonescu spoke through the interpreter, which drew out the length of Antonescu's tirade.

express his bitterness over the Vienna Award, while in subsequent meetings his experience as a military commander sometimes put Hitler on the defensive. The Führer's personal regard for Antonescu contrasted sharply with the reservations he had for the bombastic and militarily inexperienced Mussolini. Yet behind this respect for the Romanian leader lay a more pragmatic assessment, expressed by Hermann Goering: 'One must be very cautious with Antonescu. He is quite a stubborn mule but the only one in Romania who sticks to a pro-German line.'⁵⁸

General Antonescu's alliance with the Iron Guard was basically a matter of convenience.⁵⁹ It was not long, however, before the Guard's lack of discipline, its penchant for violence, and its rigid anti-Semitism sowed the seeds of discord between Antonescu and Sima, and exasperated the Germans by compromising their attempts to increase their stranglehold over the Romanian economy. The Guard's pledge to revenge its murdered leader Codreanu was honoured when they stormed into the cells of Jilava prison on the night of 26–27 November and massacred sixty-four ministers, and senior police officers whom they held guilty of murdering Guardists. This lawlessness dismayed Antonescu and disquieted Hitler. Romania was of vital strategic importance in the Führer's plan to attack the Soviet Union and he wanted order and stability in the country.

Antonescu himself, concerned about the Guard's activities, requested a meeting with Hitler and he travelled to Obersalzburg to meet the Führer on 14 January 1941. Hitler told the Romanian leader that he was the only person in Romania who could cope with any situation but that it would be impossible to govern in Romania against the Iron Guard. Antonescu would ultimately have to become the leader of the Guard and the best thing would be for this proposal to be put by Antonescu to the Guard itself.⁶⁰ Antonescu felt sufficiently encouraged by the Führer's support for him to act against it. The opportunity was provided by the murder of Major Doering, an officer attached to the German military mission, on 19 January in Bucharest. Antonescu used the murder as the justification for the dismissal of the Guardist Minister of the Interior on the following day. At the same time he removed the Guardist head of the police, the chief of the Bucharest police, and the chief of the *Siguranța*, the security police. All three refused to obey Antonescu's decree and on

⁵⁸ Quoted from Mark Axworthy, *Third Axis*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Paul D. Quinlan, *Clash over Romania. British and American Policies Towards Romania: 1938–1947* (Los Angeles, CA: American Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1977), p. 71.

⁶⁰ A. Hillgruber, *Les Entretiens Secrets de Hitler, septembre 1939–décembre 1940* (Paris, 1969) pp. 432–41.

the following day, 21 January, the latter two barricaded themselves in the *Siguranța* headquarters, together with a group of about fifty Guardists, and opened fire on the troops who had been sent to eject them. The shots marked the beginning of the Iron Guard uprising.

The revolt was largely confined to Bucharest but the Guardists did not limit themselves to defending their positions in public buildings. During the morning of 22 January, Guardists moved against defenceless Jews, looting and burning their homes, and cold-bloodedly murdering 120 of them.⁶¹ That same afternoon Antonescu ordered the army to use tanks against the barricaded Guardists and by the evening they had occupied most of the buildings. Twenty-one soldiers were killed in the operations. Acting through Hermann Neubacher⁶² with Antonescu, Sima accepted Neubacher's dictation of ceasefire terms to which Antonescu also agreed. Some Guardists laid down their arms, while others took refuge in the houses of German officials from where they were smuggled to Germany. Sima, according to the Romanian Secret Service, was hidden in Neubacher's car and driven to the German legation in Sofia, from where he was taken to Germany in an army truck.

On 27 January 1941, after unsuccessfully approaching the National Peasant Party leader Iuliu Maniu, and the National Liberal head Constantin Brătianu, Antonescu appointed a new cabinet formed almost entirely of officers. By bringing military discipline to government he hoped to avoid the rifts of the past. Precisely the Guard's indiscipline, and its treachery, ruled it out as a partner. A decree law was introduced on 5 February outlawing any unauthorized political organization. The death penalty would apply to any person found in possession of arms without authorization. The National Legionary State was dissolved on 14 February and a massive operation was launched to round up those who had taken part in the uprising.

To all intents and purposes a military dictatorship was established under Antonescu and was given the rubber-stamp of a popular plebiscite at the beginning of March 1941. Antonescu outlined his strategic goals at his third meeting with the Führer in Munich on 12 June 1941. He repeated his declaration, made at previous meetings between the two leaders, that the Romanian people were ready to march unto death alongside the Axis since they had absolute faith in the Führer's sense of justice. The Romanian people had bound its fate to that of Germany

⁶¹ Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele Evreilor din România, 1940–1944*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1946), pp. 219–323.

⁶² The Special Commissioner for Economic Questions, sent by the German Foreign Ministry to Bucharest in January 1940.

because the two peoples complemented each other both economically and politically, and they had a common danger to confront. This was the Slav danger, which had to be ended once and for all. It was Antonescu's opinion that a postponement of the conflict with Russia would prejudice the chances of an Axis victory. The Romanian people, he continued, wanted the moment of reckoning with Russia to come as soon as possible so that they could take revenge for all that they had suffered at the hands of the Russians.⁶³ Ten days later Antonescu seized his chance to regain northern Bukovina and Bessarabia when Operation Barbarossa was launched.

Antonescu's motive was not solely revenge. He saw the German attack as an ideological crusade against the infidel of Communism and his participation in it as an act of Christian righteousness. In an order of the day Antonescu told his troops that the hour had arrived for the fight against the yoke of Bolshevism, while his Vice-President Mihai Antonescu, in a broadcast on the same day, began with the words 'Romanians, today our nation has begun a great holy war'.⁶⁴ King Michael was less altruistic; in a telegram to Antonescu he expressed the popular feeling:

At this moment when our troops are crossing the Prut and the forests of Bukovina to restore the sacred land of Moldavia of Stephen the Great, my thoughts go out to you, General Antonescu, and to our country's soldiers. I am grateful to you, General, that thanks solely to your work, steadfastness, and efforts, the entire nation and myself are living the joyful days of ancestral glory.⁶⁵

The fact that Romania joined Germany in the attack on the Soviet Union without a declaration of war, albeit in order to regain the territories annexed by the Soviet Union, meant inevitably that Britain and the United States would brand it an enemy state. In the attack Romanian forces were assigned the task of protecting the right flank of Army Group 'South'. These forces were integrated into a separate Army Group under the nominal command of Antonescu which was made up of the Eleventh German Army and the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies. The latter were under the command respectively of General Petre Dumitrescu and General Nicolae Ciupercă. In effect this Group took its orders from the Commander of the German Eleventh Army, General Eugen von Schobert, in accordance with the guidelines for German-Romanian

⁶³ 'Minutes of the meeting between General Ion Antonescu and the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler on 12 June 1941' in Andreas Hillgruber, *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler. Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen über die Unterredungen mit Vertretern des Auslandes 1939–1941*, Munich, 1969, pp. 276–91.

⁶⁴ *Timpul*, 24 June 1941.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 2.1 Adolf Hitler and General Ion Antonescu emerge from their meeting in Munich on 10 June 1941.

military cooperation laid down by Hitler in a letter to Antonescu of 18 June. Here Hitler underlined the need for the direction of 'this grandiose attack' to be concentrated 'in a single hand' and requested Antonescu's 'permission to send him from time to time those of his wishes which referred to the Romanian Army and whose execution, in the interests of a unified, coordinated direction of operations, must be considered absolutely necessary'.⁶⁶

On the day of the attack, 22 June, the Romanian Guard Division, the only unit in the Romanian Fourth Army that had been thoroughly trained by the Germans, quickly established a bridgehead at Falcui. On the same day, the German 198th Infantry Division, joined by two Romanian divisions, secured a bridgehead over the river Prut at Sculeni and repulsed a Soviet counterattack the next day in which the Soviet army sustained heavy losses.⁶⁷ With this bridgehead secured, Operation *München* was launched. Its aim was for this combined force to break out of the bridgehead on 26 June and move northeast.⁶⁸ To the south, the Romanian Fourth Army attempted to move towards Chişinău (Kishinev) but was frustrated by Soviet counterattacks until early July when the Romanian Fourth Army went on the offensive and entered the city on 16 July.

After the Soviets had been swept beyond Romania's pre-1939 borders, Antonescu affirmed his loyalty to Hitler's intentions in Russia on 31 July:

I confirm that I will pursue operations in the east to the end against that great enemy of civilization, of Europe, and of my country: Russian bolshevism. Therefore, I have no conditions, and I will not be swayed by anyone not to extend this military cooperation into new territory.⁶⁹

The Romanian public regarded the retrieval of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina as legitimate war aims. General Antonescu recovered these provinces, as defined by their boundaries prior to the Soviet seizure in June 1940, by 27 July 1941 at a cost of 4,112 dead, 12,120 wounded and 5,506 missing.⁷⁰ Yet some Romanians had misgivings about going further. Iuliu Maniu and Constantin Brătianu, respective leaders of the

⁶⁶ *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Militara, 1989), p. 365.

⁶⁷ Richard L. DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers. From Coalition to Collapse* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), p. 113.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite (1940–1944)*, eds. V. Arimia and I. Ardeleanu (Șt. Lache, Bucharest: Cozia, 1991), p. 118.

⁷⁰ Mark Axworthy, *Third Axis*, p. 47. Antonescu was promoted to the rank of Marshal by the King on 22 August 1941 for the recovery of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina.

National Peasant and National Liberal parties, urged the General not to let Romanian troops go beyond Romania's historical frontiers.⁷¹

Antonescu did not heed this advice. His reasoning was strictly military – as one would expect from an officer. He recognized that Bessarabia was only secure as long as Germany defeated the Soviet Union. Of even more importance was his belief that the road to northern Transylvania lay through Russia and allegiance to Hitler. After all, if the German leader had awarded northern Transylvania to Hungary in large part to pre-empt a war between Bucharest and Budapest, and then guaranteed the new border of Romania to ward off a possible Soviet intervention that would have threatened Romanian oil fields, he might be amenable to changing his mind once the Soviet threat had been eliminated. Thus Antonescu asked Hitler to provide German forces for an advance across the Dniestr and with his request granted, on 3 August, the Romanian Fourth Army began crossing the river and moving towards Odessa in an effort to cut off the Soviets retreating before the German Eleventh Army.

The Romanian offensive against Odessa began on 18 August. Ranged against the Fourth Army was the Soviet Independent Coastal Army, which had more than 34,000 men in fortified positions.⁷² Effective Soviet resistance throughout September, including an amphibious landing in the Romanian rear which caused panic, led Antonescu to ask the Germans for assistance in making a major attack on the port, but in the event they were not needed. The Soviets decided to cut their losses by withdrawing from Odessa on 1 October and by 16 October 86,000 men and 150,00 civilians had been evacuated to the Crimea.⁷³

Romanian forces eventually entered Odessa on 17 October after fierce resistance from the Soviet forces had inflicted heavy Romanian losses. Soviet casualties were estimated at over 20,000. On the Romanian side, their losses since crossing the Dniestr rose to over 98,000 (almost 19,000 dead, 68,000 wounded and more than 11,000 missing).⁷⁴ But the area was under Axis control. With the capture of Odessa, major Romanian participation in the 1941 campaign came to an end.⁷⁵

Aware of Antonescu's wishes regarding the return of northern Transylvania, on 27 July 1941 Hitler first dangled the prospect of Ukrainian territory southwest of the Bug before the Romanian leader, inviting him to assume responsibility for the region to the southwest of

⁷¹ Aurel Simion, *Preliminarii politico-diplomatice ale insurecției române din august 1944* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1979), p. 208.

⁷² DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, p. 118.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁷⁴ Mark Axworthy, *Third Axis*, pp. 51–6.

⁷⁵ DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, p. 120.

the Bug. As Romanian troops marched on Odessa, Hitler wrote again to Antonescu on 14 August, proposing that the Romanian leader take over the entire area between the Dniester and the Dnieper. Three days later Antonescu explained that, since he lacked 'the means and trained staff', he could only assume responsibility for the administration of the territory between the Dniester and the Bug; for the remaining area – that between the Bug and the Dnieper – he would be willing to supply troops for security. At the same time, Antonescu asked Hitler to specify the rights and duties of a Romanian administration in what would become Transnistria.⁷⁶

As a result of this correspondence, Romanian and German commands signed an agreement at Tiraspol on 19 August that allowed Antonescu to establish a Romanian occupation government 'in the occupied territory between the Dniester and the Bug, with the exception of the region of Odessa'.⁷⁷ The agreement was consolidated by a convention signed on 30 August at Tighina, Bessarabia, giving the Germans control of the main railway lines and the port facilities of Odessa vital to supplying their armies in the east, but leaving almost everything else to the Romanians. Hitler acceded to Antonescu's request that the northern border of Transnistria, which had not been stipulated in the convention, be drawn to include the towns of Moghilev, Zhmerinka and Tulcin. The borders were recognized in a German order of 4 September establishing a boundary separating Transnistria from the German Army Group South Rear, and stipulating what persons and goods were to be permitted across in either direction.⁷⁸ On 17 October, the day after the fall of Odessa, Antonescu officially decreed the creation of Transnistria with Odessa as its capital.⁷⁹

It should be emphasized that no mention was made in the Tighina convention of annexing or incorporating Transnistria into Romania, despite periodic exhortations from Hitler to Antonescu to do so. Antonescu's principal reason for not wishing to annex Transnistria also stemmed from a desire to restore the status quo ante of the summer of 1940, which would see the return to Romania of all the territories annexed by

⁷⁶ Antonescu-Hitler, *Correspondență și întâlniri inedite (1940–1944)*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Coresi, 1991), pp. 116, 119–22.

⁷⁷ Olivian Verenca, *Administrația civilă română în Transnistria, 1941–1944*, ed. Șerban Alexianu (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2000), p. 57.

⁷⁸ Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule* (Iași, Oxford, Portland, OR: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 1998), p. 59. The area beyond the Bug was later to be known as the Reich Commissariat of the Ukraine.

⁷⁹ Jipa Rotaru, Octavian Burcin, Vladimir Zodian and Leonida Moise, *Mareșalul Antonescu la Odessa. Grandoarea și amărăciunea unei victorii* (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 1999), p. 224.

foreign powers during 1940, not only Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, but northern Transylvania as well. He made this clear in talks with Hitler held on 11 February 1942 when he told the German leader that he did not regard the 1940 Vienna award as definitive and that, whatever the German position, he would seek to reverse it.⁸⁰ A second reason for Antonescu's unwillingness to annex Transnistria derived from his view of the anti-Soviet war as a defensive war, one undertaken in order to neutralize the threat of Soviet bolshevism to Romania. In Antonescu's view, annexing Transnistria would have only served to rub salt into the wounds of the Russians and intensify Russia's undying enmity of Romania.⁸¹

Transnistria was for much of the period of Romanian rule synonymous with terror and death for Jews and Roma. Even before the area was placed under Romanian administration, an unknown number of Jews there had been murdered by troops of the *Einsatzgruppen D*. In compliance with the terms of the Tighina convention, most of *Einsatzgruppen D* soon moved beyond Transnistria, with the *Einsatzgruppe* units, *Sonderkommando 11a* and *Einsatzkommando 12* taking up their murderous activity in Mykolaiv on 14 September. *Sonderkommando 11b* remained behind, laying in wait outside of Odessa in anticipation of the city's fall. The exact number of Jews murdered in the province by the commandos remains unknown, but it certainly ran into many thousands.⁸² Calculations based on reports of the gendarmerie and other official Romanian documents indicate that approximately 45,000 Jews survived the first wave of slaughter by *Einsatzgruppen D* in the northern and central districts of Transnistria, a further 45,000 in the districts of southern Transnistria, and almost 100,000 in Odessa.⁸³

⁸⁰ Résumé of the talks between Hitler and Antonescu on 11 February 1942 in Antonescu-Hitler, *Correspondență și întâlniri inedite (1940–1944)*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Coresi, 1991), p. 184.

⁸¹ This is one of several illuminating points argued by Larry Watts in his introduction to A. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944*, p. 17. Hitler wanted to persuade his ally to accept Transnistria as compensation for northern Transylvania whose transfer to Hungary Germany had supervised in the Vienna Agreement of August 1940. But by the very same token Antonescu wanted to use Transnistria as a bargaining counter for the return of northern Transylvania. In Antonescu's vision Transnistria could be returned to the Ukraine or its successor regime, and Hungary could be compensated for its loss by receiving the Galician districts of Stanislav and Kolomea. (A. Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944*, pp. 59–60.)

⁸² At his trial at Nuremberg, Ohlendorf admitted that he had murdered about 90,000 Jews between June 1941 and June 1942. These included Jews from the Crimea and from regions as far afield as the river Don. Jean Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Atlas, 1998), p. 64.

⁸³ Jean Ancel, 'The Romanian Campaigns of Mass Murder in Transnistria, 1941–1942', *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Era*, ed. by Randolph L. Braham (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1997), p. 98.

Under Antonescu, Transnistria was the graveyard of an estimated figure of between 220,000 and 260,000 Jews, and for up to 20,000 Romas.⁸⁴ The Jews were deportees from Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, and from within Ukraine itself; the Roma, from Romania, shared their fate in summer 1942. Antonescu's hostility towards the Jews in the two Romanian provinces and in Ukraine was driven by his fear of Bolshevism for which he believed they had a predilection. Most of these deaths resulted from inhuman treatment and a callous disregard for life rather than from industrialized killing. This was exemplified by the forced marches of Jewish deportees – including young, old and sick – to the eastern extremity of Transnistria with the intention of driving them across the Bug into German hands; the murder by Romanian and Ukrainian guards of those unable to keep up with the columns; the massacre by the Germans of those who did cross; and the eventual refusal in late summer 1941 by the Germans to accept any more for fear of spreading typhus beyond the Bug. The consequent herding of Jews into make-shift camps without proper food or healthcare resulted in the initial wave of deaths through malnutrition and disease in the autumn and winter of 1941. The toll increased dramatically with the murder by shooting of thousands of Jews in Transnistria in December 1941 and January 1942 on the orders of the Romanian authorities. Later, several thousand Jews were shot in 1942 and 1943 in the southeastern part of the province, largely by SS units who were aided by the German minority there.

On 18 October 1941, the day after the fall of Odessa, General Constantin Trestioreanu, deputy commander of the city, issued the order for the creation of a provisional ghetto for the city's Jews in preparation for their deportation to the east.⁸⁵ The central point of the ghetto was Odessa prison. Within ten days a total of 16,258 Jews of all ages had been interned in the area around the jail.⁸⁶ For Antonescu urgency in completing the operation was given by the destruction of the Romanian headquarters in the city. On the evening of 22 October 1941, the former NKVD headquarters in Odessa on Engels Street, where General Ioan Glogojanu, the Romanian military commander of the city had set up his base, was blown up by Soviet agents. Romanian records show that there were sixty-one victims, including General Glogojanu, sixteen officers, thirty-five soldiers and nine civilians. Four German naval officers and two interpreters were also among the dead.

⁸⁴ See Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, chapter 6.

⁸⁵ Arhiva Ministerului Apărării Naționale [The Archive of the Ministry of National Defence], Pitești, Fond Divizia 10 Infanterie, file 830, p. 444.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 540.

No trial of the suspects was considered; Antonescu went straight ahead and ordered swift and indiscriminate reprisals:

a) For every Romanian and German officer killed in the explosion, 200 communists were to be hanged; for every soldier, 100 communists; the executions will take place today; b) all the Communists in Odessa will be taken hostage; similarly, one member of each family of Jews. They will be informed of the reprisals ordered as a result of the act of terrorism and will be warned, they and their families, that if a second similar act takes place they will all be executed.⁸⁷

The order was transmitted to the military authorities in Odessa during the early morning of 23 October, and over the next forty-eight hours several hundred Jews and Communists – one source puts the number at 417⁸⁸ – were hanged or shot.⁸⁹ In addition, many thousands of Jews were force-marched to Dalnyk, a few kilometres outside the city. On the intervention of Odessa's mayor, Gherman Pântea, and the acting military commander, General Nicolae Macici, the column was sent back to Odessa, but not before those Jews at the head of the column were herded into four large sheds and machine-gunned to death, after which the sheds were set on fire. How many Jews were killed in this way is not known exactly but a figure of 20,000 was mentioned at Macici's trial in May 1945. This is close to the figure in a German officer's report that 'on the morning of the 23 October, about 19,000 Jews were shot on a square in the port, surrounded by a wooden fence. Their corpses were doused with gasoline and burned.'⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Alesandru Dușu and Mihai Retegan, *Război și societate. România, 1941–1945*, vol. 1. *De la Prut în Crimeea* (22 iunie–8 noiembrie 1941, Bucharest: RAO, 1999), pp. 416–20. King Michael protested about the massacre of Jewish hostages; see Ivor Porter, *Michael of Romania. The King and the Country* (London: Sutton, 2005), p. 75.

⁸⁸ A report of the 38th Infantry Regiment dated 25 October 1941 (Arhiva Ministerului Apărării Naționale, Pitești, Fond Divizia 10 Infanterie, file 830, p. 487).

⁸⁹ A handwritten note, issued under the codename 'Gorun' of General Constantin Trestioreanu, deputy commander of Odessa, stated that 'in retaliation, several Jews and proven Communists were executed by hanging and by shooting' (Arhiva Ministerului Apărării Naționale, Pitești, Fond Divizia 10 Infanterie, file 830, dated 23 October 1941). Colonel C. Iordăchescu, commander of the 33 Dorobanți Regiment based in the city, reported on 23 October that '72 Jews and Communists had been shot according to orders from above following the explosion at the military headquarters' (*ibid.*). The bodies were thrown into the sea. I am grateful to Ottmar Trașca for these documents.

⁹⁰ Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944*, p. 74; report of Colonel Rodler dated 4 November 1941 from Bucharest (Bericht ueber Wahrnehmungen in Odessa. *Bundersarchiv-Militararchiv Freiburg im Breisgau*, RH31-I, v.108, Abwehrstelle Rumänien nr. 11035/41 g Leiter p.4. I am grateful to Ottmar Trașca for showing me this document). Those in authority in Odessa at the time the reprisals were carried out were tried as war criminals in Bucharest in May 1945. Each tried to pin the blame for the massacres on the other. Despite the evidence presented that Macici had been sent to Odessa by his superior, General Ion Iacobici, commander of the Romanian Fourth Army, immediately after

As the German-Romanian advance continued beyond Ukraine, pressure began to build up from Moscow for Britain to declare war on Romania. The British Government had not protested when Romanian forces crossed the Prut into Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina but because Romania, alongside Finland and Hungary, was at war with the Soviet Union, Stalin urged Churchill to act. Churchill was reluctant to do this and set out his reasons in a letter to Stalin dated 4 November:

These countries [Finland, Hungary and Romania] are full of our friends: they have been overpowered by Hitler and used as a cat's paw. But if fortune turns against that ruffian they might easily come back to our side.⁹¹

Stalin continued to press the matter as the Germans advanced towards Moscow and Churchill, realizing the need to give the Soviet leader a public gesture of support, finally acquiesced. On 28 November, the British Government sent an ultimatum via the US legation to the Romanian Government pointing out that for several months it had been conducting aggressive military operations on the territory of the USSR, an ally of Great Britain, in close collaboration with Germany, and warning that unless the Romanians ceased military operations in the USSR by 5 December the British Government would have no option but to declare the existence of a state of war between the two countries.⁹²

The Romanian Government did not reply until the day after the expiry of the ultimatum. It offered a justification for Romania's military action against the USSR which, it was argued, was one of legitimate self-defence in the face of Soviet aggression which had begun in 1940 with the occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. 'The Royal Romanian Government', the reply continued, 'is firmly convinced that its military action is the only way in which it can ensure its salvation against the visible Russian threat.'⁹³ When Britain officially declared war on Romania on 7 December, Antonescu, who had served as military

Iacobici had received Antonescu's order for reprisals, Macici denied that he was the person responsible for carrying it out. Instead he pointed out that it was General Constantin Trestioreanu, deputy commander of Odessa, who had reported to Antonescu that the order to take reprisals had been implemented. In answer to the charge that he had done nothing to stop the massacres, Macici replied that General Iacobici had been aware of what was happening in the city and had issued no orders to stop the reprisals. On 22 May 1945, Macici and Trestioreanu were amongst a group of twenty-nine officers sentenced to death for war crimes; a further eight were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

⁹¹ Paul D. Quinlan, *Clash over Romania. British and American Policies Towards Romania: 1938–1947* (Los Angeles, CA: American Romanian Academy, 1977), p. 71.

⁹² *Universul*, 9 December 1941.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

attaché in London and had a great admiration for Britain, expressed regret in a radio broadcast that his people's centuries-old struggle to preserve its existence, its liberty and its unity had not been understood. Romania's present action was in continuation of that struggle.⁹⁴ On 12 December Romania declared war on the United States.⁹⁵

This escalation of Romania's part in the war prompted further misgivings, not only from political quarters but also from Antonescu's own senior commanders. In a series of memoranda Antonescu's Chief of Staff, General Iosif Iacobici, fearing a surprise Hungarian attack from the West against southern Transylvania which was considered at risk because of the withdrawal of forces from there to support the campaign in the Soviet Union, urged the Marshal to limit his involvement east of the Dniester.⁹⁶ Iacobici was dismissed in January 1942 and replaced by General Ilie Șteflea, who endorsed his predecessor's views.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ The United States remained neutral until the declaration of war on Japan following the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Germany declared war on the United States on 11 December, and in response the United States Congress declared war upon Germany a few hours later. Romania declared war on the United States on 12 December 1941. It was only on 5 June 1942 that the United States declared war on Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. An order was issued on that date by the Secretary of State to all American missions: 'You are instructed to notify the Government to which you are accredited that the Government of the United States, by unanimous resolutions of Congress signed today by the President, has declared that a state of war exists between the United States and Bulgaria, and Hungary and Rumania.' (*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942*, vol. II, *Europe*, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1962, p. 841.) This was apparently to establish belligerency status and to ensure that the prisoners of war conventions were operative seven days later when thirteen B-24s under Colonel A. Halverson made the first American bombing raid of the war on the oil fields at Ploiești (Ernest H. Latham Jr., 'All Thankful: Reports by Neutral Observers of American Prisoners of War Held in Romania', in *Timeless and Transitory. 20th Century Relations Between Romania and the English-Speaking World* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2012) p. 274).

⁹⁶ *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. 1, Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1989, p. 556

⁹⁷ 'On 20 January 1942, when I became Chief of the General Staff, the Romanian army had 33 divisions: 15 east of the Dniester and 18 in Romania. On 25 February 1942 I became aware of the promise given to the Führer by Marshal Antonescu to also send to the front the divisions in Romania: namely a first echelon of 10 divisions in the spring of 1942, followed by a second echelon of 5–6 divisions, therefore almost all the divisions in the country. There would have remained in Romania only one division in the oil fields, and a division each to protect the Black Sea coast and Bessarabia ... I succeeded in delaying the despatch of the first echelon by six months and then sent them under-strength, keeping much of their artillery in the country ... By claiming that these under-strength divisions needed to be augmented by men and equipment from the division which were due to be sent in the second echelon, I was able to keep in Romania all the divisions which should have formed the second echelon. In this way, by sending the first echelon to the front at only half strength I was able to keep 120,000 soldiers in reserve,

In the course of the Soviet counteroffensive at Stalingrad in January 1943 two German armies, two Romanian armies and one Italian army were decimated. The Romanian losses in the Third and Fourth Armies in the period from 19 November 1942 to 7 January 1943 were put at 155,010 dead, wounded and missing, most of the latter being taken prisoner.⁹⁸ This represented over a quarter of all Romanian troops engaged on the Eastern Front.⁹⁹ Militarily, the Axis defeat marked a turning point in the war in Europe; the German Army lost the initiative in the war against the Soviet Union and it now began to be thrown back across Europe. Politically, the consequences were especially momentous for Antonescu. He now realized that Hitler could no longer win the war. On the advice of his Chief of Staff, General Șteflea, he had wisely not committed all of his forces to the campaigns in the Soviet Union, holding half of them in reserve to protect his country's sovereignty. It now seemed that he might have to use them for this purpose.

A close analysis reveals that Ion Antonescu was a complex and inconsistent figure. Under his leadership Romania joined the Tripartite Pact on 23 November 1940 as a sovereign state, participated in the attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 as an equal partner of Germany, and was never occupied by the Wehrmacht. Yet Antonescu *inherited* the Axis alignment, which is not to say that he saw an alternative to it, and he bore no responsibility for the internal political chaos he was called upon to manage in September 1940. This is one major paradox of his regime. There were others. He was a war criminal, sending tens of thousands of Jews to their deaths in Transnistria, and yet he refused in summer 1942 to send other Romanian Jews to the death camps in Poland. He was an anti-Semite and yet, despite the deportations to Transnistria, more Jews survived under his rule than in any other country within Axis Europe. While up to 300,000 Jews were victims of Antonescu's policies, some 375,000 Jews are estimated to have survived, principally in Wallachia,

and by keeping the second echelon in Romania I was able to save 100,000. Marshal Antonescu only learned of these measures in the spring of 1943 when, in presenting to him the plan to reorganize the army after the Stalingrad disaster, I had also to present to him the means of implementing it. The men and materials remaining in the country enabled us to re-form the decimated regiments after the Stalingrad disaster ... At the beginning of August 1944, the Romanian army was incomparably stronger than on 20 January 1942, when I became Chief of the General Staff.' (Memorandum of General Ilie Șteflea dated October 1944, Fond Casa Regală, vol IV, dosar 22/1944, Central National Historical Archives (ANIC), Bucharest, pp. 6–8.

⁹⁸ *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. 1, Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1989, p. 489.

⁹⁹ A. Simion, *Preliminarii politico-diplomatice ale insurecției române din august 1944*, p. 226.

Moldavia and southern Transylvania.¹⁰⁰ He led for five months a Fascist-style government, yet in January 1941 he removed that government in three days of street fighting and replaced it with a military dictatorship.

Antonescu enjoyed Hitler's personal respect. He headed the third-largest Axis force in the European war: 585,000 Romanian troops participated in the attack on the Soviet Union in June–October 1941.¹⁰¹ The two Romanian armies committed tied down Soviet troops that otherwise the Germans would have had to engage. The Romanian occupation of Transnistria spared the Germans this task.¹⁰² Under Antonescu's rule Romania sustained the German war effort with oil and other raw materials. All of this places Romania on a par with Italy as a principal ally of Germany and not in the category of a minor Axis satellite.

Antonescu's predicament on the eve of the war was that of a state caught between two totalitarian giants who considered they had the right to impose their interests upon continental Europe. Had Romania defied the Soviet Union in June 1940 it would probably have gained, like Finland a year earlier, widespread sympathy, but little else. Germany could not help the country since its hands were tied by the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. When Romania did go to war against the Soviet Union in the following year, it did so as Germany's ally and thus incurred the enmity of Britain. Romania's alliance with Germany was not embodied in any treaty, merely signified by adherence to the Tripartite Pact. The country was not a totally voluntary partner, as the opposition of Maniu and Brătianu demonstrated, but it was a partner and not a vassal, and remained under the control of a Romanian ruler.

Although Antonescu remained master of his own country, any attempt to withdraw from the war before 1944 invited German occupation. But by 1944, the attrition of German forces deprived Hitler of the force necessary to punish Romania for doing just that. As long as Romania was able to preserve its internal cohesion and some military might, it was able to retain its freedom of action. This is what it did until the invasion of the Red Army in spring 1944.

¹⁰⁰ Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2000). Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, p. 289.

¹⁰¹ Axworthy, *Third Axis*, p. 216. After Italy signed an armistice with the Allies on 8 September 1943, Romania became the second Axis power in Europe.

¹⁰² DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, p. 133.

3 Hungary

Ignác Romsics

Antecedents

Under the terms of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920 concluding the First World War, the territory of Hungary was reduced from 325,000 (or, discounting Croatia, autonomous within the kingdom of Hungary, 282,000) to 93,000 sq. km, while her population fell from around 20 million to 7.6 million inhabitants.¹ With this Hungary went from a medium-sized country to one of the region's small states; by comparison, in terms of territory Poland was more than four times the size of Hungary; Romania more than three times; the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes nearly three times; and Czechoslovakia one and a half times. Romania received the largest area (103,000 sq. km) with more than 5 million inhabitants. Next came Czechoslovakia with 61,000 sq. km and 3.5 million people. The South Slav state gained, in addition to Croatia, 20,000 sq. km and 1.5 million people, while Austria obtained 4,000 sq. km and almost 300,000 people. In addition, both Poland and Italy gained a share of the historical Hungarian territories. Poland received the smaller Zipser territories (Szepesség) located north of the Tatras (589 sq. km) with 24,000 inhabitants, while Italy acquired the port of Fiume (initially declared a free city) and its environs, with 21 sq. km and 50,000 inhabitants. Of the 10.6 million people living in the annexed territories 3.2 million (that is, 30.2 per cent) were Hungarian. Of these, 1.6 million lived in Transylvania and other territories awarded to Romania, 1 million in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, and almost half a million in Yugoslavia. By contrast, the number of Hungarians in Western Hungary (the Burgenland) amounted to no more than 60,000–70,000, those living in Fiume 6,000–7,000, and those in Poland 250.²

¹ This chapter was translated from Hungarian by Matthew Caples.

² János Lökkös, *Trianon számokban. Az 1910. évi magyar népszámlálás anyanyelvi adatainak elemzése a történelmi Magyarországon [Trianon in Figures. Analysis of the Mother-Tongue Data of the 1910 Hungarian Census in Historical Hungary]* (Budapest: Püski, 2000), pp. 122–66.

The drastic provisions of the peace treaty made it almost inevitable that revision of the new borders would become the chief aim of Hungarian foreign policy between the two world wars. The politically conscious groups of Hungarian society, the ruling elite and the parties, fully agreed on this. However, there was by no means a complete consensus regarding the content of revision and means of achieving it. Liberals, Social Democrats and factions of the so-called populist movement, for example, generally presented more moderate demands than conservative government circles or the extreme right. Yet governmental policy itself was not always and in every detail identical either, but rather changed from time to time as a function of the continually evolving international conditions and the prevailing domestic situation.

In the fluid situation following the signing of the peace treaty, the Teleki and later the Bethlen governments tried to approach one neighboring country or another while also contemplating a joining of forces with the defeated states and, relying on this, the possibility of another war. Alongside other reasons (for example, the attempts by Charles IV of Habsburg to seize the throne), this two-faced Hungarian conduct also contributed to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia concluding over the course of 1920 and 1921 treaties of alliance, the sole aim of which was to keep Hungary in check and offer mutual assistance in the event of an unprovoked Hungarian attack. France would become the chief patron of this political and military regional cooperation (Little Entente) and would subsequently conclude separate treaties of friendship and allegiance with all three states. These treaties, like the agreements between the states of the Little Entente themselves, guaranteed the status quo created by the peace treaties, above all the Treaty of Trianon.³

Aware of its isolation, in 1922–3 the Bethlen government broke with its previous inconsistency. From this time on the principle orientation of Hungarian foreign policy became (like German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann's *Erfüllungspolitik*, likewise announced in 1923) 'reconciliation and accommodation.' One of the first signs of this was Hungary's admission to the League of Nations on 18 September 1922. This was followed in early 1923 by application for an international loan; one condition of its issuance was that the Hungarian government once more had to recognize the validity of the borders established by the Treaty of Trianon and also guarantee that no member of the Habsburg dynasty

³ Dénes Halmosy, *Nemzetközi szerződések 1918–1945 [International Treaties 1918–1945]*, 2nd edn (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1983), pp. 156–62, 212–15, 262–5 and 272–5.

would return to the Hungarian throne. Speaking in the fall of 1923, Prime Minister István Bethlen explained the change of course as follows:

Today Europe's situation is such that it wants peace at all costs, and if we do not accommodate ourselves to the intricacies of Europe's interests, if we do not adapt our policies to Europe's interests, then no matter how right we are, we will be portrayed as peace-breakers and in no area will our efforts be crowned with success. ... Believe me, if it is difficult for anyone to practice this self-denial, it is difficult for me.⁴

The treaty of friendship with Italy, signed in Rome on 5 April 1927, may be regarded as the first significant step taken by the government to break out of its international isolation. The initiative began with Mussolini, who was seeking an ally against Yugoslavia while also striving to counterbalance French influence in East-Central and Southeastern Europe. In light of the openly revisionist orientation of Fascist Italian foreign policy, the signing of the Italian-Hungarian treaty of friendship initiated not only a more active phase of Hungarian foreign policy but also an abandonment of the Hungarian policy of accommodation, adopted out of necessity in recent years, as well as overt action against the status quo of Trianon. The conditions for this also became much more favourable after the League of Nations relaxed financial control of Hungary thanks to the successful stabilization of the economy in the summer of 1926, and military monitoring on the ground also ceased in March 1927. In his speeches in 1927 and 1928, Bethlen therefore now openly embraced what had been the chief foreign policy aim of his government and the country all along: revision. For example, in a famous speech at Debrecen in early 1928, he declared:

We did not lose provinces. We were partitioned. ... we cannot surrender one third of our race for all eternity. This we cannot accept as justice. ... If someone has buttoned his vest wrong, he can only correct his dress if he unbuttons it and then buttons it correctly. To build a permanent peace on these borders is impossible. What can only be built on these borders is a prison, in which we are the guarded and the victors the guards. ... what we need is new borders.⁵

Until the early 1930s it was Mussolini who headed the fight for European reorganization tied to border revision. From this time

⁴ "Bethlen István gróf az ország helyzetéről" [Count Bethlen on the State of the Country], *Budapesti Hírlap*, 16 October 1923. On the Hungarian foreign policy of the era in general, see Gyula Juhász, *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919–1945*, 3rd edn (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1988); in English: *Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1919–1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1979).

⁵ István Bethlen, *Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek [Selected Political Writings and Speeches]*, ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Osiris, 2000), p. 249.

on, however, Germany also turned against the order established at Versailles. Already between 1929 and 1933 (that is, prior to Hitler's accession to power), German diplomacy had in fact modified its foreign policy doctrine. The essence of the transformation may be summed up as follows: whereas Stresemann and his colleagues strove to modify Germany's eastern borders by accepting the framework of the Versailles peace system and cooperating with France, after 1929 their successors sought to topple this very system and thereby achieve revision. As one of the first signs of the new German policy line in November 1930, the German government invited István Bethlen together with his wife to Berlin for a three-day official visit. It was at this time that the Germans first declared that which Hungarian diplomacy had long waited to hear, namely that 'loosening of the French alliance system in Eastern and Southeastern Europe is a goal we have in common with Hungary, consequently we can sincerely wish Hungarian efforts to weaken the Little Entente much success.'⁶

German and Hungarian thinking about revision nevertheless differed significantly. Hungarian proposals for establishing a great, German-led revisionist bloc as well as signing a treaty of friendship and consultation directed against the Little Entente were rejected by German diplomacy both in 1934 and again in 1936. Behind this lay the absolutely self-evident assumption from Berlin's perspective that unreserved support of Hungarian revisionism would not weaken but, on the contrary, strengthen the cohesion of the Little Entente. In the view of Hitler and the Nazi leadership, in the area of revisionist policy it was solely with respect to Czechoslovakia that German-Hungarian interests coincided to a certain degree. Thus, during his discussions with Hungarian politicians (for example, with Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös in 1933 and 1935, or with Regent Miklós Horthy in 1936 and Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi in 1937), Hitler always stressed that the Hungarians 'must concentrate all of their efforts on Czechoslovakia,' and that 'their demands for 100 per cent revision are unrealistic.' By the same token, he accordingly assured Serbian and Romanian leaders that Germany had no intention of 'unconditionally supporting Hungarian revisionist intentions.' This German attitude elicited widespread disappointment and dissatisfaction within Hungarian governmental circles, and it was this that would become, along with fear of National Socialism and British prodding, one of the reasons that Hungarian diplomacy

⁶ *Akten zur deutschen Aussenpolitik*. Serie B. Band XVI, pp. 464–5.

contemplated even the possibility of coming to an understanding with the Little Entente in 1937–8.⁷

While Hungarian diplomacy weighed the possibility of reaching agreements with the neighboring states, Germany began overturning the status quo established at Versailles and redrawing the borders of Europe. The first important stage in this was the absorption of Austria on 13 March 1938. The annexation was acknowledged not only by Italy but by the Western Powers as well. Perceiving Great Britain's and France's passivity, Hitler almost on the day after the *Anschluss* began preparing his next campaign: the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. For this he also wished to use Hungary in the role of *agent provocateur*. In return for a Hungarian military attack, in the summer of 1938 he offered Hungary all of Slovakia (i.e. former Upper Hungary). The Hungarian leadership, however, did not undertake the move, which was militarily risky and, under international law, inexplicable and unacceptable. Thus, instead of the planned partition of Czechoslovakia, Hitler had to content himself for the time being with annexing only the German-inhabited Czech areas (the Sudetenland) to the Reich. The terms for this were set in the Four-Power Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938. The protocol attached to the agreement stipulated that the Hungarian and Czechoslovak governments were to reach an agreement on disputed issues concerning the Hungarian minority within three days. In case this should not succeed, the four powers proposed holding an additional joint meeting.

The Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations began in the border town of Komárom on 9 October 1938. After they failed to reach an agreement, and England and France declared their disinterest, a German-Italian arbitration took place. Under the terms of the decision, reached on 2 November 1938 in Vienna (the First Vienna Award), an area of almost 12,000 sq. km reverted to Hungary along with a population of one million. According to the 1941 Hungarian census, 84 per cent of the population spoke Hungarian as their mother tongue, whereas the Czechoslovak census of 1930 found only 57 per cent to be of Hungarian mother tongue or nationality. Considering the great discrepancy in the data from the two censuses, the percentage of Hungarians may be estimated at a minimum of two-thirds.⁸

⁷ For further details, see Ignác Romsics, 'Magyarország helye a német Délkelet-Európa politikában' [The Place of Hungary in German Policy for Southeastern Europe], *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében [Our Place and Fate in the Danubian Basin]* (Budapest: Osiris, 1996), pp. 177–233 (quotes on p. 206).

⁸ Ignác Romsics, 'Ungarn und der erste Wiener Schiedsspruch', in *Das Münchener Abkommen von 1938 in europäischer Perspektive*, ed. Jürgen Zarusky and Martin Zückert (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), pp. 341–8.

The circumstances of the Vienna Award made it obvious that Germany's support would be indispensable for any further revision. Therefore, in late 1938 and early 1939 the government, headed at this time by Béla Imrédy, attempted through various moves to demonstrate its pro-German sentiments. In late November it authorized the formation of a fascist-type organization (*Völksbund*) of the German minority, then it announced the country's intention to withdraw from the League of Nations and its wish to join the Anti-Comintern Pact. It was also thanks to this that when Hitler decided on Czechoslovakia's complete destruction in the spring of 1939, he gave Ruthenia not to Slovakia but to Hungary. The Hungarian army took possession of this territory between 15 and 18 March, at the same time that the Wehrmacht occupied the Bohemian-Moravian counties and the Slovak Republic was formed. The size of this area was once again 12,000 sq. km, and the number of inhabitants amounted to 550,000. The overwhelming majority of these declared themselves to be of Ruthenian (Ukrainian) nationality. Hungarians came to no more than 10 per cent; indeed, the Czechoslovak figures put them at less than 5 per cent.⁹

After Czechoslovakia Hitler prepared to smash Poland, and in the campaign he also expected Hungary's support. However, the Hungarian leadership resisted the temptation this time as well. Rather than cooperating with the Germans the Teleki government opened the border to the Polish refugees. In the course of the fall more than 100,000 Poles arrived in Hungary. Some soon continued on to the West, while the others would enjoy the Hungarian government's hospitality until the end of the war.¹⁰

Pál Teleki's foreign policy following the outbreak of the war was guided by two basic principles: abstention from the armed conflict of the Great Powers (armed neutrality) and fulfillment of the revisionist policy. From the latter standpoint, in everyone's eyes it was the eastern territories awarded to Romania, abounding in raw materials and cultural monuments alike, which appeared to be the most important. The opportunity to regain a part of Transylvania was created in the summer of 1940, when the Soviet Union, allied with the Third Reich since August 1939 presented Romania with an ultimatum demanding the return of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Simultaneously it informed the Hungarian

⁹ Jörg K. Hoensch, *Der ungarische Revisionismus und die Zerschlagung der Tschechoslowakei* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967), pp. 216–89.

¹⁰ *Barátok a bajban. Lengyel menekültek Magyarországon 1939–1945* [Friends in Trouble. Polish Refugees in Hungary, 1939–1945], ed. László Antal (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1985).

government that it considered a joint military action against Romania conceivable. In order to preempt this Hitler called on the Romanians and Hungarians to commence bilateral negotiations.

The Romanian-Hungarian negotiations began on 16 August 1940 in Turnu Severin. Because an agreement could not be reached this time either, once again a German-Italian arbitration was held. The result was announced on 30 August 1940 in Vienna (the Second Vienna Award). Based on this Hungary recovered 43,000 sq. km of territory with 2.5 million inhabitants. According to the 1941 Hungarian census the population was 52 per cent Hungarian, while Romanian statistics from 1930 indicated 38 per cent was Hungarian. The remainder was Romanian and German. The number of Romanians who became Hungarian citizens exceeded one million, while the number of Hungarians left in Southern Transylvania was around 400,000.

Romania experienced the Second Vienna Award as a national catastrophe and subsequently did everything to invalidate it. Hungary by contrast rejoiced. The outpouring of joy, though understandable, was unwarranted, since both the United States and Great Britain interpreted the Second Vienna Award as a diktat forced on Romania and disputed its validity. The price paid to the Germans for the award was also severe. Ferenc Szálasi, the most influential leader of the Hungarian extreme right, who until then had been serving a prison sentence, was set free. The National Socialist *Volksbund* became the only legal organization of the Germans in Hungary. Exports of foodstuffs and fodder to Germany were increased. And finally, on 20 November 1940, Hungary joined the German-Italian-Japanese Tripartite Pact established back in September, a move that signaled the end of the policy of neutrality followed until then by Teleki.¹¹

From the fall of 1940 onwards, Yugoslavia remained for Hungary the only neighboring state on which Hungarian foreign policy, now largely bereft of its independence, could still rely somewhat. It was in nurturing such hopes that the Yugoslav-Hungarian treaty of 'eternal friendship' was signed in Belgrade on 12 December 1940. The agreement spared neither country from its fate, however. After the anti-German political turnabout in Belgrade in March 1941, Hitler decided to invade Yugoslavia. In this he demanded Hungary's participation as well. With this Hungarian policy once again faced a grave decision. If Hungary yielded to Hitler's demands, and thereby achieved revision, it would lose

¹¹ Béni L. Balogh, *The Second Vienna Award and the Hungarian-Romanian Relations 1940–1944* (Highland Lakes, NJ: ARP, 2011), pp. 193–272.

the West's remaining goodwill. If the country resisted, it might retain the sympathy of the Allies, but the country would be exposed to the danger of a German occupation. Confronted with this dilemma, in the early hours of 3 April 1941 Prime Minister Pál Teleki shot himself to death. His act, intended as a warning, could no longer alter the course of events, however.¹²

The Hungarian army crossed the border a few days after the Germans, on 11 April following the proclamation in Zagreb of independent Croatia the previous day, whereby Yugoslavia ceased to exist. Because of the rapid dissolution of the multinational Yugoslav army no heavy resistance had to be overcome anywhere. In exchange for her military participation Hungary regained Bácska (Bačka), the Baranya Triangle and the Muraköz (Međimurje). Of the total population of one million in the returned areas, the percentage of Hungarians exceeded one third. In addition to the South Slavs the German population was also significant.¹³

As a result of the revisionist success between 1938 and 1941, Hungary almost doubled in territory, while its population increased to nearly 15 million. About half of the almost 5 million former-new citizens were Hungarian, the rest Romanian, Ruthenian, South Slav, German and Slovak. The return to the 'mother country' of close to half the territories annexed in 1920, along with a large portion of the Hungarians who had become citizens of foreign countries, filled the Hungarian people of the time with overflowing joy and significantly increased the government's popularity. It was at this time that Regent Miklós Horthy received, in addition to the hitherto customary epithets 'savior of the country' and 'builder of the country,' the constant appellation 'multiplier of the country' and 'multiplier of the homeland.'¹⁴

Participation in the military action against Yugoslavia and the ensuing partition of the country did not entail such catastrophic consequences as might have been assumed based on the signals of Hungarian diplomacy in the days prior to the decision. Probably thanks also to Teleki's desperate act, Great Britain in the end did not declare war on Hungary but only broke off diplomatic relations with her. Churchill declared that as long as Hungarian formations did not come into direct conflict with the Allies,

¹² Balázs Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki (1874–1941). The Life of a Controversial Hungarian Politician* (Wayne, NJ: CHSP, 2006), pp. 201–34.

¹³ Enikő A. Sajti, *Hungarians in the Vojvodina 1918–1947* (Highland Lakes, NJ: ARP, 2003), pp. 191–223.

¹⁴ Dávid Turbucz, *Horthy Miklós* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2011), pp. 159–64.

there would be no state of war.¹⁵ Thus, in the spring and early summer of 1941 Hungary was not at war with anyone, had not declared war on anyone and nor had anyone declared war on Hungary. The country would enter the Second World War on 26 June 1941 when it joined the German attack against the Soviet Union.

Hungary's Place in the German Plan of Attack Against the Soviet Union

Following the occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941, the German military leadership concentrated all of its efforts on preparing for the attack against the Soviet Union. The military plan relating to this, named Operation Barbarossa, was ready as early as December 1940. In the attack, originally scheduled for 15 May 1941 but postponed because of the intervention in the Balkans until 22 June, Hitler and his generals reckoned with the 'active participation' of only two countries alongside the formations of the Wehrmacht, Romania and Finland.¹⁶ For this reason the Hungarian leaders did not receive a substantive briefing on the plan. When Defence Minister Károly Bartha visited Berlin in January 1941, Hitler revealed to him only that the purpose of directing German troops eastward was to keep the Soviet Union from crossing its western borders. Other than preventive measures nothing else, he emphasized, was expected of Hungary. It was enough if they reinforced the line of the Carpathians, that is, the eastern Hungarian borders. This in turn was necessary, because 'if Russian Bolshevism breaks through this barrier, they would advance perhaps as far as Vienna or even further.'¹⁷ Although the German military leadership also raised the possibility of Hungary's active involvement, Hitler repeatedly and firmly refused to consider this. The Führer's awareness of the deficiencies of the Hungarian army's equipment, and even more so his knowledge that if the Hungarian army was employed the Hungarians would come forward with additional revisionist demands, probably explain his attitude. He would have considered this disruptive especially in the case of Transylvania because of Romanian oil and military strength. Knowing the Hungarians' way of thinking and their hopes, at the same time he also held out the prospect

¹⁵ András D. Bán, *Illúziók és csalódások. Nagy-Britannia és Magyarország 1938–1941* [*Illusions and Disappointments. Great Britain and Hungary, 1938–1941*] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1998), pp. 133–7.

¹⁶ *Magyarország és a második világháború* [*Hungary and the Second World War*], ed. Magda Ádám, Gyula Juhász and Lajos Kerekes (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1959), pp. 352–3.

¹⁷ Vilmos Nagy Nagybacsoni, *Végzetes esztendőök* [*Fateful Years*] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1986), pp. 72–3.

to Bartha that 'in the inevitable general settlement at the end of the war potential advantages are conceivable for friendly Hungary.'¹⁸

This German attitude fully suited the pro-Western conservative and oppositional democratic circles, who counted on the ultimate defeat of Nazi Germany or perhaps a negotiated peace. Following Pál Teleki's logic, they recommended the government and the regent adopt a wait-and-see policy, and indeed, stay out of the war if at all possible. On the other hand, the anti-Bolshevist extreme right-wing circles, assuming the victory of the Germans, and the military leadership, deeply impressed by the German successes hitherto, were disappointed. They did everything to make sure the German position changed and, if this still did not succeed, Hungary joined the attack anyway against the Soviet Union voluntarily.

One of the most committed advocates of this latter position was the chief of the Hungarian General Staff himself, General of the Infantry Henrik Werth. In his discussions with high-ranking German officers during the spring Werth became convinced that, unlike Hitler, the German military leadership could conceive of the Hungarian army participating in the military campaign. As early as May, therefore, the Operational Section of the General Staff started preparing for a mobilization of the formations needed to carry out the expected 'offensive-minded defense' on the Russian front. Simultaneously, the general composed memoranda for the government to make certain the country joined the campaign even in lieu of an explicit German request. In his memoranda Werth assumed that by staying out of the war they would put their revisionist successes achieved heretofore at risk, but by joining, as well as with a 'pro-Axis' policy, they would 'certainly recover the entire territory of historical Hungary.' In addition to achieving revision the general's arguments also included the regime's 'Christian-national-based worldview,' with which they would be at odds if 'we did not join the fight against Bolshevism.' Moreover, he judged all this to be completely devoid of risk, believing the superiority of German military strength so overwhelming that he did not devote more than a few weeks for the entire campaign.¹⁹

Henrik Werth's first memorandum, dated 6 May 1941, was rejected by the new prime minister, László Bárdossy, without the government having discussed it. A professional diplomat and foreign minister in the Teleki government (a portfolio he retained as prime minister), the sensitive head of government believed with reason that the chief of the General

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁹ *Magyar történeti szöveggyűjtemény 1914–1999* [Anthology of Hungarian Historical Texts], vol. 1, ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Osiris, 2000), pp. 330–3.

Staff had strayed into foreign waters, and his tone by comparison was too self-confident. In the ensuing weeks, however, others also recommended to the prime minister that the country join unconditionally. One of them was the Hungarian minister to Berlin, Döme Sztójay, also originally an army officer. In early June Sztójay, like Werth, sent word home that 'we should offer the Reich Chancellor our concrete military participation in a possible anti-Soviet campaign as soon as possible and in an appropriate form. Possibly even in the form of a defensive and offensive alliance.'²⁰ This and other such opinions also prompted Bárdossy, after receiving Werth's second memorandum dated 14 June, to immediately convoke an extraordinary session of the Ministerial Council. His aim in doing so was to even further emphasize his continued rejection of this idea. His calculation proved correct. The ministers, agreeing with Bárdossy, themselves thought that without an unambiguous German request not only would it be improper to offer assistance, but even a larger-scale mobilization could give rise to unwanted conjecture. Despite this, to prepare for every possibility Bárdossy instructed Sztójay to request precise information about German plans without delay.

The German minister to Budapest, Otto von Erdmannsdorff, informed Bárdossy of Ribbentrop's reply on 16 June. This went beyond previous German communications in that he made it explicit: the goal of the German troop movements was not simply deterrence but a reinforcement of German demands to be raised against the Soviet government. Thus, perhaps an attack as well. Nevertheless, the foreign minister of the Reich continued to ask Hungary to be prepared for every eventuality, simply to 'take proper steps on her own part to secure her borders.'²¹ Bárdossy immediately notified Werth and Sztójay about the briefing, emphatically warning them to represent the government's position.

The Germans kept their precise intentions a secret from the Hungarian leadership right up until 19 June. On this day, however, they finally informed Henrik Werth that a German attack was being prepared against the Soviet Union and would take place within a week. The position on Hungary, however, did not change thereafter either. Because of this Werth and other Hungarian military officers voiced their displeasure on several occasions. The German generals, while sympathizing with their Hungarian comrades, could not alter Hitler's instructions.

²⁰ Lóránd Dombrády, *Hadserg és politika Magyarországon 1938–1944 [Army and Politics in Hungary, 1938–1944]* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1986), p. 224.

²¹ *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról 1933–1944 [The Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary. German Diplomatic Documents about Hungary, 1933–1944]*, ed. György Ránki, Ervin Pamlényi, Loránt Tilkovszky and Gyula Juhász (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968), p. 591.

The only possibility they saw for Hungary to join was on a voluntary basis. General Alfred Jodl, chief of the Operations Staff of the German Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (OKW), sent word through the liaison officer assigned to the Hungarian army on 22 June (that is, on the afternoon of the day of the German attack), explaining that: 'Every Hungarian assistance will be accepted at any time. We do not wish to demand anything, but everything that is offered voluntarily will be gratefully accepted. There is no question of our not wanting participation by Hungary.' General Kurt Himer forwarded the message without delay to General Dezső László, chief of the Operational Group of the Hungarian General Staff. Erdmannsdorff, who likewise knew about the message, in turn informed the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.²² In light of all this, Miklós Horthy's subsequent claim that immediately after the German attack Hitler in a separate letter 'demanded that we should declare war on the Soviet Union,'²³ must be considered untrue. Hitler's letter of 21 June, replete with the usual conventions of Nazi phraseology, contains no mention of this. The Führer merely expressed his thanks that the Hungarian army, by reinforcing the border zone, would 'prevent Russian flank attacks and tie down Russian forces.'²⁴

The Soviet Union's Offer

Between 1939 and 1941 the Soviet Union achieved strategic border rectifications against Finland, absorbed Eastern Poland and the three Baltic States, and finally re-annexed Bessarabia and Bukovina from Romania. There are indications the Soviet leadership was not averse to pushing its European borders further to the West, and indeed, the possibility of an armed confrontation with Germany was considered. At the same time, neither Stalin nor his immediate entourage gave any credence to diplomatic and intelligence reports about preparations for a German attack against the Soviet Union. The Soviets assumed that the British, in the interests of lessening their own burden, were exaggerating the German threat, and they appraised the German troop concentrations along the border simply as an attempt at blackmail by Hitler. The clash, while

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 597–8; in English, see *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D (1937–1945), vol. 13 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), p. 16.

²³ Miklós Horthy, *Emlékirataim*, 2nd edn (Toronto: Stephen Vörösváry, 1974), p. 225; published in English as Nicholas Horthy, *Memoirs* (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1957), p. 189.

²⁴ *Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához 1936–1945*, vol. 5, ed. Gyula Juhász and Judit Fejes (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), pp. 1203–4. Cf. *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország*, pp. 594–7.

anticipated of course, was expected at a later date. For this reason the people's commissar for defence ordered military preparedness only after a great delay, barely two hours prior to the German attack, even then only with certain restrictions. The Kremlin wanted to avoid giving Berlin reason to cite Soviet provocation at all costs. The consequences are well known. German troops initially advanced 20–60 kilometres per day, while Stalin literally fell apart. He drank himself into a stupor, and for four days was unavailable to anyone. He spoke in public for the first time on 3 July, eleven days after the attack. In the meantime Molotov and the other people's commissars acted in his stead. In addition to organizing the defence, they strove in the first place to keep whomever they could out of the military operations against them. It was with this intent that the commissar for foreign affairs also summoned the Hungarian minister to Moscow, József Kristóffy.²⁵

At a meeting on the morning of 23 June, Molotov inquired about Hungary's position regarding the German-Soviet conflict. In the interests of securing Hungarian neutrality he declared that the Soviet Union 'has no demand or hostile intent towards Hungary, has had no objection to Hungarian demands being realized at Romania's expense, and in the future will have no objection in this regard either.'²⁶ Although Molotov's political diary contains less than this, from a Hungarian perspective it can still be regarded as favourable. It reads thus: 'The Soviet Union has no objection to Hungary's increase in territory achieved at Romania's expense.'²⁷ To Molotov's question, Kristóffy declared that he considered Hungary's entry into the war unlikely. At the same time, he asked to be allowed to get in contact with his superiors without delay.

While Kristóffy negotiated with Molotov and waited for the opportunity to contact Bárdossy, the Ministerial Council convened in Budapest. It is characteristic of the Hungarian military leaders' shortsightedness that the minister of defense, Károly Bartha, summarized the probable outcome of the war thus: 'I think that, having defeated the Poles in three weeks, having finished off the French in about as much time, and having beaten the Yugoslav army in twelve days and occupied the entire Balkans in three weeks, in six weeks the Germans will be in Moscow and completely defeat Russia.' Werth was even wider of the mark. In his memorandum of 14 June he predicted that the Hungarian infantry soldiers

²⁵ Robert Payne, *Stalin. Macht und Tyrannei* (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1981), pp. 505–11.

²⁶ *Diplomáciai iratok*, p. 1214.

²⁷ Quoted in Attila Kolontári, *Magyar-szovjet diplomáciai, politikai kapcsolatok 1920–1941* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2009), p. 343; in English: *Hungarian-Soviet Relations 1920–1941* (Highland Lakes, NJ: ARP, 2010), p. 380.

to be called up 'could return home in time for the harvest.' Only the minister of the interior, Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, abstained, calling for careful consideration. Even after several had commented, the body still rejected the plan to join the campaign. It did, however, decide to break off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.²⁸ Bárdossy conveyed the Ministerial Council's decision to the German minister on 23 June, while his deputy, János Vörnle, informed the Soviet minister that same afternoon.

When Bárdossy arrived at his office on the morning of 24 June, József Kristóffy's telegram was already waiting on his desk. Bárdossy informed no one about this telegram, not even the regent. Despite the fact that Molotov's uncertain promise naturally could not be taken at face value, this was a mistake. In his trial before the People's Tribunal in 1945 Bárdossy justified his failure to do so by claiming that the Ministerial Council resolution of the previous day had in fact already answered Molotov's question about Hungary's attitude. 'The telegram of the Hungarian minister to Moscow therefore was irrelevant already at the time of its arrival,' he declared.²⁹ Bárdossy's argument does not hold water, however. After all, the Soviet message could have been answered quite easily, noting Molotov's pledge while expressing regret for the Hungarian move, taken under duress. Similarly, it could have been possible to signal also that the break-off of diplomatic ties did not necessarily imply anti-Soviet military action would follow. Of course, no state of duress, as we know, existed, but 'misrepresentations' of this kind have, after all, formed part of the toolkit of diplomacy since time immemorial.

Kristóffy was informed of the Hungarian Ministerial Council's decision on the evening of 24 June. The next morning he immediately requested an audience from Molotov, who, however, would no longer receive him. In his place the deputy commissar for foreign affairs, Vyshinsky, acknowledged the severance of diplomatic relations between Hungary and the Soviet Union at noon. In the subsequent hours the police hermetically sealed off the Hungarian embassy from the outside world and then evacuated it the next day. Kristóffy together with the embassy staff departed for home via Turkey.³⁰

²⁸ Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives]. K 27. Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek [Minutes of the Ministerial Council], 23 June 1941.

²⁹ *Bárdossy László a népbíróság előtt [László Bárdossy before the People's Tribunal]*, ed. Pál Pritz (Budapest: Maecenas Könyvkiadó, 1991), p. 230.

³⁰ *A moszkvai magyar követség jelentései 1935–1941 [Reports of the Hungarian Embassy in Moscow, 1935–1941]*, ed. Peter Pastor (Budapest: Századvég és Atlanti Kiadó, 1992), pp. 315–17.

The Casus Belli

By 25 June German and Romanian troops had penetrated deeply into Soviet territory. By this time they had been joined by a few Slovak units as well, which reached the San River by 26 June and from there advanced towards Lvov (L'viv). The Independent Croat State made 5,000 volunteers available to Hitler. Italy had already declared war on the Soviet Union on 22 June, though its expeditionary corps of 60,000 arrived at the eastern front only later.³¹ Although Finland at first hesitated between neutrality and joining Hitler's aggression, German troops used Finnish territory for the invasion from the very beginning. The large-scale Soviet air attack against Finnish territory on 25 June and the repeated skirmishes along the border made the decision easier. On 26 June the Finnish troops were ordered to return fire and on 28 June they commenced their advance into Karelia. Among Germany's European allies, Bulgaria neither joined the campaign nor broke off diplomatic relations with Moscow, and for the time being Hungary too was absent from among the attackers. The pro-German Hungarian military leaders therefore busied themselves to ensure that the German military organs were able to recruit volunteers from among the *Volksdeutsche* of Hungary. Already on 25 June, at a brunch celebrating the German victories on the eastern front, General Kurt Himer was called upon to lead the prospective *Volksdeutsch* unit from Hungary.³² In the end, however, the plan to set up a volunteer corps came to naught, because the plan lost its *raison d'être* the very next day. On 26 June an event occurred which seemed to provide the entire country with an appropriate justification to go to war: an aerial attack struck the city of Kassa (Košice, Slovakia) and an express train heading from Kőrösmező towards Budapest.

Proceeding in the area of Rahó (today Rakhiv, Ukraine), the locomotive came under machine-gun fire from three Soviet fighter planes at 12.10 pm. The attack claimed one fatality; a handful were wounded. The culprits, reconnaissance planes either over-fulfilling their assignment or not detecting the border precisely, had already flown into Hungarian territory previously (Rahó lay about 20 km from the 1939 Hungarian-Soviet border and about 30 km from the Romanian-Hungarian border of the time). On the other hand, the three unmarked bombers that attacked Kassa, located a few kilometres from the Slovak-Hungarian border, arrived in the airspace of the town at 1.10 pm and dropped twenty-nine

³¹ Peter Gosztony, *Hitlers fremde Heere* (Dusseldorf and Vienna: Econ Verlag, 1976), pp. 102–36.

³² Dombrády, p. 240.

100 kg bombs. The post office, the nearby artillery barracks and a few residential houses in the area sustained hits. The attack caused thirty-two fatalities and wounded several dozen (more than 200 according to certain sources). By the time the surprised Hungarian air defences were roused, the planes, relieved of their payloads, had flown on and disappeared behind the clouds.³³

At 1.45 pm the air defence command reported to the General Staff that unidentified planes had carried out a bombing attack against Kassa, and that markings in Cyrillic letters could be seen on the bomb fragments. After this entry in the General Staff's so-called 'intelligence register,' the following addendum – undated and without indicating the source – can be read: 'According to a report coming in subsequently the attacking planes were Russian planes painted yellow.'³⁴ Werth, who naturally was informed immediately, accepted this determination as a fact without the slightest doubt or uncertainty. Together with Defence Minister Bartha, he immediately went to see the regent, who received them at around two o'clock in the afternoon. Like Werth and Bartha, Horthy had no doubts about the veracity of the news (i.e. that it had been Soviet planes that had carried out the attack). He therefore made an immediate decision, instructing Werth to initiate the aerial reprisal campaign and launch an attack by the best-equipped, so-called Mobile Corps, along with one mountain and frontier brigade each. At the same time he summoned Bárdossy, whom he informed about his decision. The prime minister made no objection either but instead immediately convened an extraordinary session of the Ministerial Council.

At that meeting Bárdossy and Bartha briefed the members of the government about what had happened. Both men concluded their accounts by asking their fellow ministers to support a declaration of a state of war. Against this only a single counter-proposal was voiced, by the interior minister, Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, who once again counseled caution and patience. He believed that entry into the war should be declared only at the express request of Germany. Having heard these opinions, the government passed a resolution, summed up by Bárdossy as follows: the government unanimously favoured an immediate military action in retaliation for the Soviet aerial assault against the train from Kőrösmező and the city of Kassa. After noting the interior minister's objections, the prime minister concluded that 'as a consequence of today's repeated unjustified and unprovoked attacks by Soviet air forces against Hungarian territory

³³ Julián Borsányi, *A magyar tragédia kassai nyitánya [The Opening Act of the Hungarian Tragedy: Kassa]* (Munich: Dr. Dr. Rudolf Trofenik, 1985).

³⁴ Dombrády, p. 241.

during this very day, in contravention of international law, Hungary regards herself as being in a state of war with the Soviet Union.³⁵

Under the terms of the decisions taken on 26 June, the Hungarian air force directed an attack without a declaration of war against the Galician town of Stanislau (today Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine) and its environs at dawn on 27 June. The ground troops crossed the border at Volóc (Volovets) on the afternoon of the same day, but already before noon had engaged in a fire-fight with Soviet border guards. The official announcement, broadcast on the radio at ten o'clock in the morning, was terse and, like all other documents, avoided the phrase 'declaration of war.' Instead it spoke of a 'state of war,' into which the country had been pushed because of the Soviet Union's 'attacks in violation of international law' against Hungary.³⁶ Bárdossy made a statement in a similar vein in Parliament at 10.30 am. According to the testimony of the parliamentary diary, his declaration was greeted by 'enthusiastic cheers of *éljen* (long live!)'; no contrary opinion was heard, and no vote took place. The reaction of the Upper House was similar, though it registered the change in the country's status only on 4 July. Horthy, meanwhile, informed Hitler of his decision in an enthusiastic private letter. 'I declare myself fortunate,' he wrote, 'that our armed forces will take part shoulder to shoulder with the glorious and victorious German army in the crusade to destroy the Communist menace and preserve our culture.'³⁷

Who Bombed Kassa?

Hungary's entry into the war, the circumstances of which I have attempted to present above as factually as possible, raises a number of questions. Among these one of the most important is: who bombed Kassa? The official version of the time, according to which Soviet planes had been responsible, in fact contains a number of holes. First of all, why would they have done so? How would it have served the Soviet Union's interest to increase the number of its enemies? Obviously in no way. This is proved not only by Molotov's communication of 23 June, but also the Soviet reply to the Hungarian entry into the war, which the Soviet Telegraphic Agency in Moscow (Tass) published on 27 June. The

³⁵ MOL. K 27. Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek [Minutes of the Ministerial Council], 26 June 1941. Cf. Sándor Szakály, *Hadsereg, politika, társadalom* [Army, Politics and Society] (Budapest: Lánchíd Kiadó, 1991), pp. 68–72.

³⁶ The declaration is published in *Dokumentumok a XX. század történetéhez* [Documents for the History of the 20th Century], comp. Vilmos Gál and Attila Szilárd Tar (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2001), pp. 162–3.

³⁷ *Diplomáciai iratok*, pp. 1244–5.

communiqué firmly denied that Soviet planes bombed Kassa. The same message was conveyed at noon on 27 June to Deputy Foreign Minister Vörnle by Soviet minister Sharonov, who was preparing to leave the country. He emphatically declared that the Soviet Union had no hostile intentions towards Hungary, and as in his earlier communications indicated also that his country took an understanding view of Hungarian revisionist claims.³⁸

Despite all this, naturally it is conceivable that Soviet planes did commit the aggression, even if not deliberately. For Kassa could easily have been mistaken for Eperjes (today Prešov, Slovakia), one of Slovakia's important military bases, or some other town in Slovakia. Such errors in navigation were committed by American planes also, when they bombed Zurich and Schaffhausen, and at other times towns in Sweden. But even in this case there remains an unanswered question: why were no markings seen on the planes? These, after all, should not have been concealed in the event of either a deliberate provocation or inadvertent border violation. These were indeed visible on the reconnaissance planes strafing the train, but not on the planes bombing Kassa. These dilemmas would have been clarified via diplomatic means in a day or two. The Soviet Union could have denied it, as it did on 27 June, or it could have apologized. This, however, obviously was not in the interest of any of the Hungarian decision-makers. They all waited for a pretext, therefore the report or speculation, treated as fact, came at expressly the right moment.

Already a significant number of contemporaries did not believe in the theory of an unprovoked Soviet attack either. Among them were Flight Captain Ádám Krudy, training officer of the Kassa airfield, who allegedly a few hours after the attack had informed Bárdossy (whom he knew personally) in a letter that the Russian-labeled bombs had been dropped by disguised German airplanes. However, because a state of war had arisen in the meantime, Bárdossy would have concealed this information as well. Horthy also subsequently lent credence to this version. 'Bárdossy had,' he wrote in his memoirs, 'therefore replied to Krudy, asking him to keep silent on the matter if he wished to avoid personal unpleasantness, and he also imposed silence on his staff.'³⁹ This version was confirmed also by Staff Colonel (later Major General) István Újszászy, chief of Section 2 of the Hungarian Army's General Staff. According to his written testimony, read out in his absence at the Nuremberg Trials, the attack was contrived by Colonel Cuno-Heribert Fütterer, the German air attaché in Budapest, in collaboration with the Hungarian General

³⁸ Kolontári, p. 392.

³⁹ Horthy, *Emlékirataim*, p. 227; Horthy, *Memoirs*, p. 191.

Dezső László. They came up with the idea that ‘German aircraft, camouflaged as Russian planes, should bomb the eastern border districts of Hungary, with bombs of Soviet Russian origin.’⁴⁰ However, this version also has weaknesses. First and foremost: why would the Germans have invested energy into an action from which no serious military benefit could be hoped for? And if they had, then why did they take seriously Werth’s and László’s proposal of 25 June on organizing volunteer formations composed of Germans from Hungary, about which the prospective commander, Kurt Himer, even briefed Berlin on the twenty-sixth? The fact that Krudy’s alleged report has yet to be discovered, and that Újszászy’s quoted testimony was prepared in Soviet military captivity, gives cause for further doubt.

Like every unsolved historical mystery, the bombing of Kassa has also become fertile ground for the most varied speculations. In his 1944 memorandum István Bethlen suspected the private action of ‘Czech air-planes’ heading to the Soviet Union as being behind the aggression.⁴¹ The British scholar C.A. Macartney, who was very familiar with contemporary Hungarian conditions, likewise suspected the Czechs to have been behind the act. Citing Hungarian sources, he believed that Ondřej Andele, a Czech air force officer who had fled to the Soviet Union back in 1939, led the bomber unit under his command over Kassa. According to others the planes were flown by Slovak pilots guided by a desire for revenge, who would have taken off from some airfield in western Slovakia with the permission of the Slovak state president Jozef Tiso. In the early 1980s, when the anti-Hungarian policy of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania gained strength, and in consequence of this Hungarian-Romanian relations deteriorated, it was suddenly claimed that Romanian planes taking off from Suceava in Moldavia had provoked Hungary with the aim of drawing Hungarian military forces or a part of them to the Eastern Front; in other words, withdrawing them from behind Romania’s back.⁴² And of course there are those who considered the role of the Hungarian General Staff to be decisive. ‘The attack, very well and deliberately organized and precisely executed, and the active air activity witnessed around it,’ writes for example the Hungarian military historian Lóránd Dombrády, ‘could hardly have been carried out without the

⁴⁰ *Vallomások a holtak házából [Testimonies from the House of the Dead]*, ed. György Haraszti (Budapest: Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, Corvina, 2007), p. 595; for Újszászy’s testimony in English, see *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, vol. 7 (Nuremberg, 1947), p. 334.

⁴¹ *Bethlen István emlékirata 1944 [István Bethlen’s Memorandum, 1944]*, ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1988), p. 112.

⁴² For details, see Borsányi, pp. 151–263 and 346–367.

knowledge and collaboration of the General Staff.⁴³ And if this is no more than speculation, it is a fact that the order relating to the examination ordered on 27 June, that is, after the decisive steps were taken, which was composed at Section 1 of the Hungarian General Staff, is, to put it mildly, prejudiced. 'It must be absolutely clarified and proven,' it reads, 'that Soviet airplanes in gross violation of international law carried out a bombing assault against Hungarian sovereign territory.'⁴⁴

To the present no one has succeeded in uncovering unambiguous proof in support of any version. However, it may be taken for certain that the Soviet Union did not deliberately provoke Hungary. If Soviet planes did indeed bomb Kassa, they certainly did so not at Moscow's command, but either by mistake or by obeying the overzealousness of some military commander.

The Question of Responsibility

The other important question is: who was responsible for the move, subsequently condemned by many, even, in a cautious way, by Miklós Horthy himself? It is known that the National Council of People's Tribunals justified László Bárdossy's death sentence after 1945 by declaring that the accused 'took part in taking the decision by which Hungary broke off diplomatic relations with, and then declared war on, Russia.'⁴⁵ This assertion is undoubtedly true, though on this basis Horthy, too, could have been brought to trial; indeed, according to many he could have even been sentenced to death, since it was he who gave the final word on his own authority, whereas Law I of 1920, which defined the regent's authority, did not empower him to do this. This stipulated that: 'To declare war or use the army outside the country's borders and conclude peace the prior consent of parliament is necessary.'⁴⁶ Yet the two houses of parliament gave their consent only after the fact, and no one asked the state elders in advance. On this basis Horthy and Bárdossy alike have received much criticism in both post-1945 journalism and, indeed, the historical literature. Both of them essentially have been accused of breaking the law. This, however, is a grave legal error. For the regent's authority defined in Law I, adopted on 29 February 1920, was extended on 19 August of the same year. And one of the elements of the extension concerned precisely the question of declaring war. This stated that the regent, and

⁴³ Dombrády, p. 242.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Kolontári, p. 388.

⁴⁵ Bárdossy *László a népbíróág előtt*, p. 366

⁴⁶ *Magyar történeti szöveggyűjtemény*, p. 136.

only the regent, could order the army's 'deployment outside the country's borders' if three conditions were obtained or fulfilled. These were the following: 'immediate threatening danger'; the 'joint responsibility of the Hungarian cabinet'; and finally parliament's 'retroactive consent to be requested without delay.'⁴⁷

Of the three conditions the second was fulfilled without fail. Within barely an hour the government approved and confirmed the regent's decision. With some delay the third condition, parliament's consent, was also realized. The Chamber of Deputies acknowledged Bárdossy's announcement on 27 June, the Upper Chamber on 4 July without the least protest. From this respect, therefore, everything or almost everything was in order. However, the extent to which the machine-gunning of the express train to Budapest and the bombing of Kassa could be regarded as an 'immediate threatening danger' is obviously questionable. Werth, Bartha, Horthy, Bárdossy and the majority of the ministers viewed it as such because they wanted to view it as such. More or less all of them were blinded by the German military successes up until then and hoped for additional territorial gains by joining. In addition, they were also driven by the anti-Bolshevism characteristic of the entire Hungarian political elite, including Horthy.

Nevertheless, the decision had its opponents as well. They included István Bethlen, who following the German attack explained to Horthy and to an intimate circle of others that joining the German assault on the Soviet Union would be an error for several reasons. First of all, because German victory was by no means certain, and thus at the war's end Hungary could again end up on the losing side. Second, because the Hungarian army was unprepared to wage serious warfare, and the weapons of even the better equipped units could not withstand the Russian winter. And finally, because Hungary had no territorial demands whatsoever against the Soviet Union, nor was it Hungary's task to defend Europe from the threat of Bolshevism 'by sacrificing the flower of her people.' He must have sensed, however, that his arguments would not be accepted in influential circles. Therefore, when he learned of the bombing of Kassa, he knew immediately what would follow. Later on, in 1944, too, Bethlen saw that there had been no question of actual Russian aggression, 'the gullible Hungarian public was made to believe this by propaganda meant to trick us into the war by painting the bogey of Bolshevism on the wall.'⁴⁸

György Barcza, the former minister to London, held a similar opinion. According to him, 'the Hungarian controlled press' had served up this

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁸ *Bethlen István emlékirata*, p. 112.

‘unresolved incident inflating it into a Soviet attack,’ so that entry into the war could occur. ‘If a government wants war at any cost, there is always a pretext to justify it, or it is easy to conjure one up, and if it does not want it, then there are extremely many logical and honorable possibilities of avoiding this in good faith.’⁴⁹ According to his reminiscences, Antal Ullein-Reviczky, head of the press division of the Foreign Ministry, even attempted to persuade the prime minister to reconsider the decision. However, Bárdossy, sitting dejectedly in one of the armchairs in his study, brushed off his suggestion. ‘Since the chief of the General Staff, evidently in agreement with the Germans, has determined that it was the Russians, and since the regent also believes it, it was them and that’s final!’ he replied to his former fellow diplomat. Then to conclude the conversation he also added: ‘Because our soldiers, in league with the Germans, are determined that nothing will deter them from drawing us into the war, as is obviously the case, we will be unable to avoid it, especially taking into consideration that Romania has become a belligerent.’⁵⁰

Thus, based on the situation assessments of Bethlen, Barcza, Ullein-Reviczky and others Horthy could even have been accused of breaking the law, since the ‘immediate threatening danger’ did not exist. Yet if this is put aside and the entire decision-making process considered legal, even then from a political perspective the responsibility of the decision-makers, in the first place Horthy and Bárdossy, but in addition the ministers and deputies, can be raised. For without explicit compulsion they carried the country into a war, the outcome of which was at least doubtful and to which no Hungarian interest attached whatsoever. The presumption that in the event of a German victory the unity of historical Hungary might be restored attested to a complete misunderstanding of German intentions. In the event of German victory the fate of every East European people (numerous secret Nazi plans about this were drafted during the war) would have been subservience, even if not in equal measure.⁵¹ Nor did the appeal to the moral imperative of joining the ‘crusade’ against Bolshevism appear convincing either. Thus, as one of the army’s generals (and later on the country’s prime minister in August and September 1944) even admitted in his memoirs, the Hungarian troops

⁴⁹ György Barcza, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945 [My Diplomatic Memoirs]*, vol. 2, ed. László Antal (Budapest: Európa-História, 1994), pp. 24–5.

⁵⁰ Antal Ullein-Reviczky, *Német háború – orosz béke* (Budapest: Európa-História, 1993), pp. 99–100; originally published in French as *Guerre allemande, paix russe* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1947), p. 108.

⁵¹ On this, see Pál Pritz, *Pax Germanica. Német elképzelések Európa jövőjéről a második világháborúban [German Plans during World War II about Europe’s Future]* (Budapest: Osiris, 1999), pp. 66–239.



Figure 3.1 A sign in Hungarian and Russian which reads: ‘Russians!! It was the Hungarian Army that brought you back: The cross, the land and your freedom. 1942.’ Koltunovka, Belgorod region, presumably the summer of 1942.

‘headed off to war with no great enthusiasm.’⁵² Or as one of the division commanders reported from the front: the conscripted peasants and workers – the bulk of them poor – ‘either could not or did not want to understand the war’s aim.’⁵³

Consequences

After the ‘reprisal campaigns’ by the air force on 27 June, the Hungarian units designated for attack (the so-called ‘Carpathian Group’, some 60–70,000 men strong) crossed the Hungarian frontier on 1 July. Over the course of the summer and fall the group’s partially motorized fast-moving formations advanced several hundred kilometres deep into the Soviet Union’s southern territories, reaching the Donets River by late October. The group’s other units secured the line between the country’s border and the fighting force while also overseeing occupation duties. In four

⁵² Géza Lakatos, *Ahogy én láttam [As I Saw It]* (Munich: Auróra Könyvek, 1981), p. 45.

⁵³ István Nemeskürty, *Requiem egy hadseregért [Requiem for an Army]* (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1972), p. 25.

months of operations the Carpathian Group suffered nearly 4,000 casualties, and about 1,200 armored and other vehicles were destroyed. The cyclists were exhausted, and the supply of horses deteriorated. As a result of bargaining with the Germans, in November the attacking formations were therefore allowed to return home. Following this the size of the Hungarian military overseeing duties in the Soviet theater of operations behind the lines temporarily hovered around 40,000–50,000 men. However, when the German assault stalled in the spring and summer of 1942, additional Hungarian troops were dispatched to the eastern front, this time expressly at German urging. The Soviet offensive begun on 12 January 1943 broke through the defensive line of the approximately 200,000-strong Hungarian Second Army along the Don in two days. Because of the enemy's numerical superiority and the minus-forty-degree cold, the Hungarian army suffered a catastrophic defeat in the two-week battle. Of the 200,000 men about 40,000 died, 35,000 were wounded, many disappeared and about 60,000 fell into captivity. Eighty per cent of the army's weaponry and equipment was likewise lost.⁵⁴

Even if Henrik Werth and László Bárdossy did not, Miklós Horthy quite soon awakened to the prematurity of the June 1941 decision and to its tragic consequences. This explains why he dismissed Werth from his top post as early as 9 September 1941 and appointed Lt. General Ferenc Szombathelyi to head the General Staff. In contrast to Werth, Szombathelyi believed that Hungarian military strength must be preserved to the fullest extent possible until war's end and German demands fulfilled only to the minimum extent necessary. Werth's firing was followed by Bárdossy's dismissal on 7 March 1942; his place was taken by Miklós Kállay, a representative of the conservative, Anglo-Saxon-oriented Teleki-Bethlen group. From his assumption of government, Kállay strove to loosen German-Hungarian ties, regain the lost confidence of the West and, in his domestic policies, prevent a further shift to the right. The Allies' landing in North Africa in November 1942, the catastrophe of the Hungarian Second Army on the Don in January 1943 and the surrender of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad on 2 February 1943 reaffirmed his determination. In late 1942 and early 1943, through several intermediaries he made contact with the Western Allies. The terms of the preliminary ceasefire conditions accepted on 9 September 1943 required Hungary to reduce economic and military support to Germany, withdraw its troops from Soviet territories, and turn against the Germans as soon as Allied forces reached the Hungarian border.

⁵⁴ Krisztián Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban [The Hungarian Army in the Second World War]* (Budapest: Osiris, 2004), pp. 20–228.



Figure 3.2 Hungarian military cemetery (Alekseevka, Belgorod region, presumably the end of the summer of 1942).

German intelligence possessed detailed information about Kállay's peace feelers. For this reason, as early as September 1943 Hitler ordered plans be drawn up for the occupation of Hungary (Margarethe I and II); by early 1944 these had taken concrete form. Hitler anticipated an Anglo-Saxon parachute campaign, and to prevent this he gave the command to occupy Hungary militarily. Threatening the participation of Romanian troops, the Führer made certain that Horthy remained in his post and instructed the Hungarian military commanders, in agreement with the chief of the General Staff, to welcome the German troops not as enemies but as friends. For this reason, apart from some minor skirmishes, the German occupation of the country encountered no real resistance.⁵⁵

With the German occupation of 19 March, a new era began in Hungary's involvement in the Second World War. Döme Sztójay, until then minister to Berlin and a dedicated adherent of the Germans, became the new prime minister. The members of his government were all extreme-right politicians (though the Arrow Cross was excluded). During its five months in

⁵⁵ Pál Pritz, 'A Kállay-kormány kül- és belpolitikája' [The Foreign and Domestic Policies of the Kállay Government], in *Magyarország a II. világháborúban*, ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum, 2011), pp. 91–100.

office the Sztójay government did all that the Germans and the extreme right had been demanding up until then. The left-wing and bourgeois opposition parties, among them the Independent Smallholders' Party and the Social Democratic Party, were disbanded. The Gestapo, along with the Hungarian police and gendarmerie, took some 3,000 persons into custody. All dailies, with the exception of the pro-German extreme right newspapers, were banned. The hitherto authoritarian but parliamentary system now assumed a dictatorial character.

A decisive change had occurred in the situation of the 800,000-strong Jewish community, until now severely discriminated against, though not endangered physically. Starting on 29 March the Jews were obliged to wear the six-pointed yellow star, then their property was confiscated, and their shops and workshops were seized. All this, however, was only the beginning of the 'Final Solution': the gathering of the Jews into ghettos and sending them to extermination camps. This was directed by the special *Judenkommando* under the command of Adolf Eichmann with the collaboration of the Hungarian gendarmerie. The first trains left Hungary on 15 May 1944. By late June 1944 some 440,000 persons, the overwhelming majority of the provincial Jewish community, had been deported. Regent Horthy tolerated all this silently and passively. However, under the influence of foreign and domestic protests, as well as further German defeats and the Allied landing at Normandy, in early July 1944 he finally had the deportations halted. By taking action he saved the lives of some 200,000 Jews from the capital.

Resistance comparable to the armed underground movements in Western Europe or the Polish and Yugoslav partisan battles did not emerge in Hungary even after the German occupation. This may be explained primarily by the fact that a significant part of Hungarian society felt gratitude towards the Germans, and Hitler personally, for remedying Trianon. The other impeding factor was fear of the Red Army and the Soviet regime already experienced in 1919, which had a paralyzing effect even on those who otherwise did not admire Nationalist-Socialist ideals and by this time did not believe in a German victory either. For this reason, and because of the repressive nature of the regime, the underground resistance movement organized by the disbanded leftist parties and the Communists, operating illegally since 1919, still did not move masses.⁵⁶

In order to improve conditions for resistance the leaders of the underground resistance movement made contact with Horthy. However, the regent was reluctant to cooperate with the left and put arms in the hands

⁵⁶ Szabolcs Szita, 'Magyarország megszállása és a holokauszt' [The Occupation of Hungary and the Holocaust], in *Magyarország a második világháborúban*, pp. 101–14.

of workers ready to act. Instead he sought to lead events in a different direction simply by changing governments. His candidate was Colonel General Géza Lakatos, who assumed his post on 29 August. During its one and a half months in power the Lakatos government brought about a few favourable changes in domestic policy. But when it came to concluding the war as soon as possible, its activity was characterized by hesitation and delay. Although as a result of the Romanian volte-face on 23 August, beginning in early September fighting was now raging on Transylvanian soil, the prime minister and the regent still trusted in the arrival of the Western Allies. The Hungarian ceasefire delegation thus left for Moscow only on 28 September. In the preliminary agreement, signed on 11 October, Hungary agreed to evacuate all territory acquired after 1937 and declare war on Germany. On this same day Soviet troops crossed the Tisza and occupied the city of Szeged.

The country's populace and the army knew almost nothing about the signing of the ceasefire and the preparation to change sides. The Germans, on the other hand, possessed precise information about this, too. Partly for this reason, and partly due to a lack of preparedness, the attempted volte-face of 15 October was thwarted. Acquiescing to the Germans' demands, Horthy resigned his post as head of state, and the leader of the Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi, was appointed prime minister. A few days later Szálasi also seized the prerogatives of head of state for himself. The Germans persuaded Horthy to legalize the coup by making it possible for him and his family to leave the country and guaranteeing that his son, lured into a trap a few days earlier and being held captive, would be released.

Still believing in the ultimate victory of the Germans, Szálasi and his followers considered intensification of the country's war effort as their most important task. They announced a total mobilization, which applied to the entire Hungarian male population. They also increased the amount of the military contribution to be paid to Berlin, reduced food rations and promised to raise eight new divisions. The remaining Jewish population once again found itself in deadly peril. Despite international and Hungarian solidarity, tens of thousands of Jews from the capital also perished.⁵⁷

By Christmas 1944 the blockade had closed around the capital. Fighting on the Pest side of the Danube came to an end on 18 January 1945, and in Buda on 13 February. The German military leadership would subsequently launch one last offensive on Hungarian soil. However, their

⁵⁷ Rudolf Paksa, 'A kiugrási kísérlet és a nyilas uralom' [The Attempt to Withdraw from the War and Arrow-Cross Rule], in *Magyarország a második világháborúban*, pp. 129–38.

attack in Transdanubia, entailing great casualties, by mid-March had collapsed. The Red Army continued its westward advance. Armed combat lasted until mid-April.

Eight months of combat in Hungary, as well as the requisitions by the retreating German and attacking Soviet and Romanian troops, resulted in destruction more than five times the national income in 1938, and approximately 40 per cent of the national wealth. This made Hungary one of the countries that suffered the most severe wartime damages. The losses in human life were even more harrowing. In the First World War, out of a population of 21 million, 530,000 persons (2.5 per cent) were lost. In the Second World War some 6.2 per cent of a population of 14.5 million, or approximately 900,000 persons, perished. These included an estimated 340–360,000 soldiers and about half a million Jews. Some 600,000 wound up in Soviet captivity, while 300,000 surrendered to the Anglo-Saxon powers.⁵⁸

And to all this was added the understandable resentment and unveiled antipathy of Stalin and the Soviet leadership, which was just as prevalent in the economic and domestic political spheres as in the border issue. ‘Hungary,’ reads the recommendation on this drafted by the Soviet peace preparatory commission for Molotov in January 1944, ‘must be made to understand that the Allies have not forgotten the position she took in the present war. Therefore the Soviet Union’s policy regarding Hungary should be confined to preserving the Hungarian state, but reducing her territory where possible, strictly following the ethnographic principle. In cases where application of the principle in question would raise some doubt, the issue must be resolved to Hungary’s detriment.’⁵⁹ After the war this is essentially what happened. Although the Western Powers, first and foremost the United States, would have been ready to modify the Romanian-Hungarian border in Hungary’s favour, the Soviet Union vetoed all such notions. Thus, the peace treaty signed in Paris on 10 February 1947 in the end restored the Trianon borders of 1920, the only difference being that Czechoslovakia received an additional three Hungarian villages across from Bratislava.⁶⁰ For this reason, post-1945 journalism bestowed upon Miklós Horthy, not entirely without reason, an additional epithet: the man who ‘lost lands.’

⁵⁸ Ungváry, pp. 305–480.

⁵⁹ Magdolna Baráth, ‘Majszkij a szovjet külpolitika perspektíváiról – 1944’ [Maiskii on Soviet Foreign-Policy Prospects, 1944], in *A sztálinizmus hétköznapijai* [Everyday Stalinism], ed. Tamás Krausz (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2003), pp. 505–33.

⁶⁰ Ignác Romsics, *Az 1947-es párizsi békeszerződés* [The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947] (Budapest: Osiris, 2006), pp. 189–248.

Jan Rychlík

Historical Background: Slovakia and Slovak Autonomism

The Slovak language, belonging to the western-Slav language group, is closely related to the Czech language. Both languages are mutually comprehensible and Czechs and Slovaks understand each other. For this reason the Czechs in the past usually considered the Slovaks to be part of the Czech nation and Slovak to be just another dialect of the Czechs. In Slovakia, this idea was not commonly accepted but, still, the idea of Czech-Slovak reciprocity was relatively strong in the nineteenth century. As a result the idea of a common Czecho-Slovak state gradually emanated during the First World War.

Czechoslovakia appeared on the map of Europe on 28 October 1918 from the ashes of Austria-Hungary.¹ The main argument on the international level was that Czechs and Slovaks form one nation and that the new state is a realization of their right of self-determination. The new state was hailed by the Czechs and the Slovaks alike, although each of the two communities interpreted it quite differently. For the overwhelming majority of the Czechs, the Czechoslovak Republic was simply the enlarged version of the ancient Czech state which existed as a fully independent unit up to the accession of the Austrian Habsburg Dynasty to the Bohemian throne in 1526 and *de jure* as a part of the Habsburg (and later Austrian) Empire even after that date.² This old state now

¹ In English, see for example: Hugh Seton-Watson – Christopher Seton-Watson: *The Making of A New Europe. R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary*. London: Methuen, 1981, pp. 294–5, 314–15; Jan Rychlík – Thomas D. Marzik – Miroslav Bielik (eds.): *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with the Czechs and Slovaks. I. Documents 1906–1951*. Praha – Martin: Ústav T. G. Masaryka – Matica slovenská, 1995, pp. 25–9; Radimír Luža – Victor Mamatey (eds.): *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

² In 1526 Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was elected King of Bohemia by the Bohemian estates and in the same year he was also elected King of Hungary. Austrian lands, the Lands of Bohemian Crown (e.g. the Czech Lands) and the Lands of Hungarian Crown (Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia) were united in the form of a personal

resurrected and expanded eastward as far as Jasina (in Ruthenia, or Subcarpathian or Transcarpathian Ukraine). Czechoslovakia was to be the national state of a political Czechoslovak nation composed of two ethnic and linguistic nations (or 'branches', to use the terminology of the period), with each of the branches developing independently in cultural affairs. It is true that there were many Slovaks, mainly the Lutherans, who accepted the idea of the single and unified Czechoslovak state and to some level also the idea of the single Czechoslovak nation. The majority of the Slovaks, mainly the Catholics, however, did not approve this idea.³ They wanted Slovakia to be an autonomous unit. The idea of Slovakia as an autonomous unit was not new: it existed already before 1918 when Slovakia was part of Hungary. Many Slovaks transposed into Czechoslovakia their visions regarding the solution of the Slovak question dating from the Hungarian period, and therefore understood the new state to be Czecho-Slovakia,⁴ i.e. essentially two states (like Austria-Hungary) sharing certain common administration. The Czechs and the Slovaks were to constitute independent political nations of their own. The fact that the Czechoslovak Constitution of 1920 and the subsequent Language Act No. 122 of 1920 used the terms 'Czechoslovak nation' and 'Czechoslovak language' (while the statement of justification accompanying the law clearly stipulated that the 'Czechoslovak language' is merely a symbol of state sovereignty and that in practice the official languages are Czech and the Slovak) enabled the autonomists to rally the masses under the banner of the struggle for national rights. The first stage of the

union, but each of them retained full autonomy in domestic affairs retaining *de jure* separate kingdoms. The separate status of the Czech lands was curtailed in 1749, but even after that, from the formal point of view, Habsburgs still only ruled these lands as kings of Bohemia. The separate status of the Kingdom of Hungary, on the other hand, was officially recognized in 1867 by an Austrian-Hungarian compromise: Hungary had its own government and parliament and was connected to the Austrian monarchy only by ministries of foreign affairs, war and common finances.

³ The Lutherans, who formed after 1918 about 18 per cent of the Slovak population, were always much more closely related to the Czechs and the Czech culture despite the fact that the majority of Czechs were Catholics and the number of Protestants of various denominations in the Czech lands was even lower than the number of Lutherans in Slovakia. The reason for this was historical: Bohemia and Moravia used to be Protestant countries up to the beginning of the seventeenth century but Protestants were expelled in 1627 and 1628. Many expelled Protestants found refuge in Slovakia (being then part of Hungary) where they gradually fully integrated into the local Lutheran community. The Slovak Lutherans up to the second half of the twentieth century still used the Czech Protestant Bible from the beginning of the seventeenth century and also used old Czech as a liturgical language.

⁴ The Slovak autonomists indeed usually used the hyphenized form of the name of the state, e.g. Czecho-Slovakia (instead of Czechoslovakia, which was used by the Czechs) because this form better expressed their political program and desires.

struggle against 'Czechoslovakism' was to seek an explicit recognition of the Slovak nation as an objectively existing community distinct from the Czechs. The main political force fighting for the recognition of the existence of the separate and distinguished Slovak nation was the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (*Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana* – HSĽS) led by the Catholic priest, Monsignor Andrej Hlinka (1864–1938).

The autonomists, however, did not only seek an explicit recognition of the existence of the Slovak nation; they were more concerned with its consequences. The reasoning of HSĽS, which had the most detailed and best-formulated national political program, stemmed from the idea that the official existence of the Slovak nation would give it a natural sovereignty over the territory it inhabited. In other words, if the Slovak nation joined the Czechs in a single state, it did so because it was advantageous for it at that moment – and when it became disadvantageous in the future, the nation would have the right to throw in its lot with any other nation or to establish a state of its own.⁵ Thus, the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic was to be a mere transit station for the Slovaks before they acquired full sovereignty for themselves. As the official Slovak autonomist ideologist Štefan Polakovič maintained, the homeland of the Slovaks was not to be the Czechoslovak Republic, but merely 'a part of that land lying under the Tatra Mountains'.⁶

Slovak Autonomy and the Declaration of Independence

From 1935 HSĽS negotiated repeatedly both with Czechoslovak Prime Minister Milan Hodža (who was himself a Slovak) and with President Edvard Beneš about the question of autonomy. The negotiations were led mainly by the vice-chairman of the party, Catholic Priest Dr Jozef Tiso (1887–1947), member of the Prague parliament from 1925 and minister of public health and physical education from 1927 to 1929.⁷ In 1938 the programme for political autonomy finally became reality. On 29 September 1938 the prime ministers and foreign ministers of Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy met in Munich. Czechoslovakia,

⁵ Jozef Tiso: *Ideológia Slovenskej ľudovej strany [Ideology of the Slovak people's party]*. Prague: Kultúrny odbor Svazu čs. studentstva, 1930, p. 15.

⁶ Štefan Polakovič: *K základom slovenského štátu [On the origins of the Slovak state]*. Martin, Slovakia: Matica slovenská, 1939, pp. 65–6.

⁷ At the end of the war Jozef Tiso fled to Bavaria where he was arrested by American CIC and extradited to Czechoslovakia. On 15 April 1947 the National Court in Bratislava sentenced him to death. On Jozef Tiso see: Jozef Mace Ward: *Priest, Politician, Collaborator. Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 98–105.

which was not represented at the conference, was forced to cede the borderlands (the so-called Sudetenland inhabited by ethnic Germans) to Germany. HSLS took advantage of the Munich Agreement which weakened Czechoslovakia. Tiso, who was acting chairman of HSL'S after Hlinka's death on 16 August 1938, summoned the representatives of all Slovak centre-of-right political parties to Žilina (a town in northern Slovakia) and forced them to accept the autonomist program. The leftist parties – the Communists and the Social democrats – were not invited to participate. On 6 October a concrete plan for the implementation of autonomy was presented to the central government of Prime Minister Jan Syrový in Prague. The government accepted it and agreed to transfer power into the hands of the autonomous Slovak authorities. Jozef Tiso was appointed first Minister for Slovakia and later – after the installation of other ministers – Prime Minister of the autonomous Slovak government. On 18 November the House of Deputies (the lower house of the National Assembly in Prague) and on 22 November also the Senate (the upper house) passed the Constitutional Law (No. 299/1938) changing the Czechoslovak centralist constitution of 1920. Slovakia obtained a wide autonomy and a similar Constitutional Law (No. 328/1938) also granted autonomy to Ruthenia. Czecho-Slovakia (the new official spelling of the name of the country) became in fact a loose federation with strong confederative elements. Decisive powers were now in the hands of an autonomous government and the autonomous parliament (*snem*) in Bratislava.⁸ Only foreign policy, defence and all-state finances were regulated by the laws of the National Assembly, the joint Czecho-Slovak Parliament. These laws also had to obtain the majority among Slovak deputies.

HSLS was not an adherent to a multi-party system and a democratic form of government. At the party congress in Piešťany on 19–20 September 1936 democracy was rejected as an outdated concept. The program of the party was based on the social teachings of the Catholic Church, nationalism, anticommunism and also the model of the authoritarian 'estate state' as it existed in Austria and partly also in Italy, Portugal and Franco's Spain.⁹ At the party congress some young pro-German and pro-Nazi activists, led by Alexander Mach (1902–80), were elected to the party's executive committee. Jozef Tiso, then still vice-chairman of the party, was not an adherent of Nazism, but this by no means meant that

⁸ The autonomous government and the Diet for Ruthenia, now called Carpathian Ukraine, had their seats in Chust.

⁹ Róbert Arpáš: *Autonómia: víťazstvo alebo prehra?* [*Autonomy: A Victory of Defeat?*] (Bratislava: Veda, 2011), pp. 47–52.

he advocated parliamentary democracy. He personally was an adherent of the authoritarian theory of Austrian sociologist Otto Span in which the state should be ruled by 'carefully selected able people', not by those chosen in a general election, because the election itself does not guarantee the quality of those elected. Tiso, who studied theology at the Vienna University before the First World War, was also influenced by the anti-Semitic theories of Karl Lueger, the then Lord Mayor of Vienna.¹⁰ Autonomy under the leadership of HSLS thus meant the introduction of a totalitarian regime in Slovakia, which from its very beginning was anti-Czech and anti-Jewish and, owing to the international situation in Central Europe after Munich, entailed Slovakia's absolute dependence on Nazi Germany. The transformation of the political system from democracy as it existed in pre-Munich Czechoslovakia to the authoritarian rule of HSLS took place during October and December 1938. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press and other political rights were abolished and strong censorship was imposed on all newspapers and other publications. Trade unions, which in the interwar period were usually affiliated to various political parties, were dissolved or forced to merge with the Christian Workers Association, the only permissible union controlled by HSLS. The Slovak autonomous government dissolved and then banned the Communist Party before doing the same to the Social Democratic Party. Centre-of-right political parties were forced to merge 'voluntarily' with HSLS. This was a case with the Slovak branch of Czechoslovak Republican Peasant and Smallholders Party (usually called the Agrarian Party), the strongest political party in pre-Munich Czechoslovakia. Except for HSLS only two parties representing German and Hungarian minorities were allowed, and even these parties could not run independently in the elections to the Slovak Diet. The elections took place on 18 December 1938. Only a single list of candidates, dominated by the HSLS, was presented to the electorate, and in these circumstances they 'captured' 98 per cent of the votes.¹¹

Slovakia's main problem internationally was its relationship to neighbouring Hungary. Hungary in fact never gave up hopes of reintegrating,

¹⁰ Albert Šimončič – Jozef Polčín: *Dr Jozef Tiso. Prvý prezident Slovenskej republiky. [Dr Jozef Tiso – The First President of the Slovak Republic]* (Bratislava, 1941), pp. 17–18. Jozef Miloslav Kirschbaum: *Dr. Joseph Tiso – The Prelate-Politician who Died on the Gallows for His People*. In: *Slovakia*, vol. XXII, 1972, No. 45, pp. 7–8.

¹¹ On the period of autonomy see: Jan Rychlík: *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Spolupráce a konflikty 1914–1992 [The Czechs and Slovaks in the 20th Century. Cooperation and Conflicts 1914–1992]*. 2nd edn (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2015), pp. 153–82. In English see: František Vnuk: *Slovakia's Six Eventful Months (October 1938–March 1939)*. In: *Slovak Studies IV, Historica 2* (Cleveland-Rome, 1964); Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, pp. 161–201.

if not the whole of Slovakia, then at least its southern part inhabited by the Hungarian minority. The Hungarian government presented its territorial claims to the Czechoslovak government, which empowered the Slovak autonomous government led by Tiso, to negotiate with Budapest. The negotiations started on 10 October 1938 in Komárno (the border town on the Danube), but led nowhere because the Hungarian claims were unacceptable. Instead, the two sides agreed to submit to the international arbitration of Germany and Italy. On 2 November 1938, by the so-called first Vienna Arbitrary Award, Czecho-Slovakia was forced to cede southern Slovakia and the South of Carpathian Ruthenia to Hungary. Shortly after that, on 25 November, Poland too raised territorial claims with Slovakia. Slovakia again had to give up three small regions in the northern part of the country (Upper Spiš, Upper Orava and part of the Kysuce), which were all annexed to Poland. Tiso's government in Bratislava came to the conclusion that only close cooperation with Nazi Germany could save Slovakia from being divided between Hungary, Poland and Germany.

The main factor in the disintegration of Czecho-Slovakia was Nazi Germany, because by the autumn of 1938 Hitler had already decided to 'finish with' the country. Yet direct occupation would mean an open violation of the Munich Agreement. For this reason Germany planned to use Slovak separatists: Slovakia was to separate from the Czech lands and proclaim independence. At the beginning of 1939 Slovak politicians were not unanimous. There were two wings within HSLS: the Catholic conservative wing of the Prime Minister Jozef Tiso, who wanted to model Slovakia on the basis of the Austrian or Portuguese corporatist structure; whereas the radicals led by Alexander Mach, and later by Vojtech Tuka, were adherents of Nazi Germany. While Tiso demanded a gradual loosening of ties with the Czechs and the proclamation of independence only later, the radicals wanted to proclaim independence immediately with the help of Germany. Tiso, however, took no action against the radicals.

At the beginning of March 1939 the Czechs lost confidence in Tiso. On 9 March the central government in Prague decided to proclaim martial law in Slovakia, effective as of the following day. The Czecho-Slovak army took over political power in Slovakia and arrested the separatist ľudák leaders, while others fled to Germany (or rather to Austria, which had already been annexed to Germany in March 1938). President Emil Hácha suspended Tiso and appointed a new Slovak government led first by Jozef Sivák and then by Karol Sidor. The Germans first tried to persuade Sidor to proclaim independence. When he refused they contacted Jozef Tiso and invited him to Berlin. Tiso arrived on 13 March 1939 and was confronted with Hitler's demand to proclaim independence.

Hitler explained to Tiso that the German army would occupy the rest of Bohemia and Moravia and, if Slovakia did not separate from the Czech lands immediately, Germany would lose any interest in it. On the other hand, if Slovakia separated, Germany would protect her. Tiso understood this message as a warning that in the case of non-separation Germany would allow Hungary to occupy Slovakia. However, Tiso did not want to proclaim Slovakian independence from Berlin on his own authority. He called Czecho-Slovak President Emil Hácha in Prague and asked him to convoke the Slovak Diet for the next day. On his return to Bratislava the next day, Tiso addressed the Slovak Diet in a closed meeting and explained the threatening international situation. After some hesitation the Diet passed a law proclaiming Slovakia an independent state. The following day (15 March 1939) the German army occupied the rest of Bohemia and Moravia and annexed it on 16 March as the so-called Protectorate within the German Reich. Czecho-Slovakia ceased to exist.¹²

The Slovak Republic¹³

According to the 1940 census, independent Slovakia had 2,653,053 inhabitants and a total size of 38,055 square kilometres.¹⁴ According to the constitution of 21 July 1939 (Constitutional Law No. 185/1939) Slovakia was a republic. The law-making body was, as before, the Diet elected by universal suffrage for five years. The Diet elected the President

¹² Theodor Prohaska: *The Second Republic*. In: Radimír Luža – Victor Mamatey (eds.): *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 255–70.

¹³ The country is today sometimes referred to as the First Slovak Republic to distinguish it from the contemporary (Second) Slovak Republic, which came into being on 1 January 1993. The contemporary Slovak Republic does not consider itself to be the legal continuator of the First Slovak Republic.

¹⁴ Contemporary attitudes toward the wartime Slovak Republic (the term ‘Slovak state’ is commonly used) continue to divide both Slovak historians and Slovak society. Most Slovaks generally admit the significance of the Slovak state as an important milestone on the road to self-determination and independence, but are very critical as to the nature of the state, mainly to its non-democratic and totalitarian character, participation in the extermination of Slovak Jewry and – last but not least – the fact that it took part in the war against Poland, the USSR and formally also against Great Britain and the United States. Yet there is also a relatively small minority of defenders of the Slovak state. See for comparison: Jozef Lettrich, *A History of Modern Slovakia* (New York: Frederic A. Praeger, 1955 (2nd edn: London: Atlantic Press, 1956, 3rd edn: Toronto: Slovak Research and Study Centre, 1985), Jörg K. Hoensch: *The Slovak Republic*. In: Radimír Luža – Victor Mamatey (eds.): *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic*, pp. 271–95, Milan Stanislav Ďurica, *Slovakia during World War II. The Slovak Republic*. In: Joseph M. Kirchbaum, *Slovakia in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Toronto: Slovak World Congress, 1973), pp. 161–94.

for seven years. The executive body was the Slovak government. In this respect Slovakia was a standard state with the republican form of government. However, in practice the system had nothing to do with a liberal and democratic state according to Western standards. No elections to the Diet ever took place: the deputies were those elected on the single list of candidates on 18 December 1938. Article 44 of the constitution allowed the government to issue the decrees with the validity of law. These decrees were to be approved later by the Diet but in many cases it did not happen. The civic freedoms, like freedom of press or freedom of assembly, were 'temporally' suspended after the beginning of the war on 1 September 1939; however, the suspension was extended until the end of the war. The governmental decree of 24 March 1939 (No. 32/1939) empowered the Ministry of Interior and police authorities to confine 'politically unreliable' elements in the concentration camp at Ilava for unlimited periods. The constitution also had no legal provision for the equality of citizens. The first anti-Jewish legislative measures took place already in 1939 and culminated in the spring and summer of 1942 when most of the Slovakian Jews were handed over to German authorities in occupied Poland where almost all perished. As before independence, no political parties except HSĽS and two small parties for the Hungarian and German minority (*Szlovenskoi Magyar Párt* and *Deutsche Partei*) were permitted. The leading role of HSĽS in the Slovak republic was even codified in article 58 of the constitution.

In domestic politics there was a struggle between Tiso's conservative wing of HSĽS and Tuka's pro-Nazi wing¹⁵ supported by the Chief of Staff of the Hlinka Guard, Alexander Mach.¹⁶ On 26 October 1939 Tiso was formally elected by the Diet President of the Slovak Republic,

¹⁵ Vojtech Tuka (1880–1946) originally worked for the reunification of Slovakia with Hungary. He was an editor of HSĽS daily *Slovák* and in 1925–8 was also an MP for HSĽS in the Czechoslovak National assembly (Parliament) in Prague. In 1928 he was accused of high treason and espionage in favour of Hungary. Tuka was arrested, put on trial and sentenced to fifteen years jail on 5 October 1929. In 1937 he was pardoned and in 1938 he returned to Slovakia and re-entered political life. While in prison Tuka changed his political orientation and instead of unification with Hungary he started to work for Slovakia's independence under the auspices of Nazi Germany. Due to a stroke he had to leave his political post in 1944. After the war he was again put on trial for high treason and sentenced to death.

¹⁶ Alexander Mach (1902–80) was a journalist and adherent of the radical autonomist wing of HSĽS. He was accused of espionage together with Tuka in 1928 but was exonerated. During the war he supported radical pro-German policies, including the deportations of Jews from Slovakia, but, curiously, he also maintained contacts with some members of the opposition and resistance, both non-Communist and Communist. Indeed it was probably due to him that the repressions up to 1944 were relatively mild. In 1947 Mach was sentenced, as a Nazi collaborator, to thirty years in jail. He was pardoned in 1968.

unifying in his hands the highest state and party functions. As the president, Tiso had to step down as prime minister and this post was given to Tuka. It seemed the conservative wing had won, but Tuka's pro-Nazi faction was supported by Germany. Berlin did not want a transfer of power into Tuka's hands because it was aware of his faction's limited influence among the Slovak population, but it used them as leverage against the conservatives and Tiso. On 28–29 July 1940 the Slovak politicians, including Tiso, were summoned to a meeting with Hitler in Salzburg. Here Hitler brazenly interfered in Slovak domestic affairs. The Minister of Foreign affairs and the Minister of the Interior, Ferdinand Ďurčanský, who in the spring of 1940 had tried to secretly contact the British Government and negotiate the recognition of the neutral status of Slovakia, was forced out of the government. Tuka, in addition to his role as the prime minister, was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, while Alexander Mach became the Minister of Interior. Due to Tuka's influence, Slovakia started to implement a Slovak form of National Socialism. Tiso was able to exert some influence over this hybrid ideology, ensuring it was based on Slovak nationalism and papal catholic encyclicals.¹⁷ Formally speaking, the struggle between conservatives and pro-Nazi radicals was won by the former group, but Tiso had to accept part of their programme, mainly in the 'solution of the Jewish question'. By law 215/1942 'on the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party' Tiso, as a chairman of HSLS, was proclaimed 'the leader' (*vodca*) of the nation with the right to decide the political line of the party and to appoint party officials at the lower ranks.

The Slovak regime was certainly repressive, yet it must be said that, compared with the countries directly occupied by Germany and also the other German satellite states, the repression was relatively mild. The German secret political police (the Gestapo) could not operate directly in Slovakia and German laws were not valid there. Slovakia did partly adopt the legal system of the defunct Czechoslovakia; the judges and state attorneys, whom Slovakia inherited from the Czechoslovak period, were generally not adherents to the new regime and were reluctant to punish any opponents severely. Their judicial power and independence from political factors remained up to summer of 1944. The new extraordinary 'Law on the crimes against the state' (No. 320/1940) was approved by

¹⁷ Štefan Polakovič, *Slovenský národný socializmus [Slovak National Socialism]*. Bratislava, 1941, pp. 374–5. Štefan Polakovič, *Tisova náuka [Tiso's Thought]* (Bratislava, 1941), pp. 7–30. About the political development and struggle between two wings of HSLS see: Milan Stanislav Ďurica, Slovakia during World War II. The Slovak Republic. In: Joseph Miloslav Kirchbaum: *Slovakia in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Toronto: Slovak World Congress, 1973), pp. 180–1.

the Diet which outlawed and criminalized any political activity directed against the *ľudák* regime and enabled it to punish people taking part in illegal activities by death. In practice, however, even after the promulgation of this law, the sentences against members of the opposition remained relatively mild. While the Gestapo openly terrorized Bohemia and Moravia and the German courts sentenced thousands people to deaths, conditions in Slovakia remained (except for Jews) tolerable. Up to the Slovak National Uprising at the end of August 1944 there was not a single execution for political crime in Slovakia.

Formally Slovakia was an independent state with its own army and foreign representation. Its sovereignty, however, was severely limited by its special relationship to Germany. According to the 'Treaty of Protection' (*Schutzvertrag*), signed originally in Vienna on 18 March and conclusively in Berlin on 23 March 1939, Germany obtained the right to build military bases in the so-called 'Zone of Protection' (*Schutzzone*) which was situated in Western Slovakia between the White Carpathians and the border of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Slovakia was also obliged to conduct its foreign and defence policy according the interests of Germany.¹⁸ A secret protocol to the Treaty of Protection subordinated the Slovak economy to German needs.¹⁹

It should be added that the real value of the Treaty of Protection was problematic from the very beginning. On 15 March 1939 the Hungarian government (with the consent of Nazi Germany) decided to annex Ruthenia (Carpathian Ukraine). Hungarian troops, opposed only by the retreating Czechoslovak Army and nationalist Ukrainian military units, occupied the region within three days. After that, on 18 March 1939, Hungarian forces invaded Slovakia from the east, engaging the newly established Slovak army, before occupying and annexing part of eastern Slovakia. Slovakia asked Berlin for assistance according to the Treaty of Protection just concluded, but instead of help Berlin, as 'a mediator between Bratislava and Budapest', forced Slovakia, on 24 March, to agree with the annexation of the occupied territory.

Apart from Germany, Slovakia was recognized by about thirty states including neighbouring Hungary and (up to the beginning of war) Poland. Great Britain and France only gave Slovakia *de facto* recognition,

¹⁸ Eduard Nižňanský et al. (eds.): *Slovensko-nemecké vzťahy 1938–1941 v dokumentech/ Slovakisch-deutsche Beziehungen in Dokumenten 1938–1941*. [Slovak-German Relations 1938–1941 in documents] I. (Hereafter cited as SDBD I.) Prešov: Universum, 2009, doc. 96, pp. 305–6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 307–8.

but opened consulates in Bratislava. After the beginning of the war, however, both countries withdrew their representatives. By contrast, the Soviet Union at first refused to recognize Slovakia, but this changed when the Soviet army, as a consequence of the secret protocol to the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact (23 August 1939), joined Germany in its war against Poland (17 September 1939). On the eve of the Soviet invasion of Poland, Moscow recognized Slovakia both *de facto* and *de jure*. Despite the repeated efforts of the Slovak League of America, the organization of American Slovaks, the United States never recognized Slovakia even *de facto*.

Opposition to the Regime and the Resistance

Between 1939 and 1945 the development of the Czechs and Slovaks was different. The Czechs never accepted the German occupation, and the collaborationist Czech government in Prague had almost no support from the population. President Emil Hácha, the last president of Czechoslovakia, who was allowed to maintain his office in the Protectorate, was not considered to be the true representative of the Czech nation. The population saw the future in the restoration of the Czechoslovak republic under its former (pre-Munich) president Edvard Beneš, who established first the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris (in 1939) and – after the fall of France in June – the provisional Czechoslovak government in London, which was recognized by the British government on 21 July 1940. Many Czechs clandestinely left the protectorate to join the Czechoslovak army abroad which started to be organized first in Poland and after that in France and Great Britain.

The situation in Slovakia was different. The Slovak society was divided. Many Slovaks welcomed the new state. Some of them were sincere adherents of the new totalitarian Ľudák regime, but even those, who did not support it, were nevertheless proud of the fact that, for the first time in history, the Slovaks had their own state. In 1939–40 the regime was more or less accepted by the majority of Slovak inhabitants.

Notwithstanding the view of the majority, from the very beginning there was an organized opposition to the regime. In Slovakia there were the so-called ‘Czechoslovaks’, who considered Czechoslovakia to be their motherland. Many of them – like the Czechs from the protectorate – left Slovakia to join the Czechoslovak army abroad. Moreover, some former Czechoslovak diplomats of Slovak nationality, like Juraj Slávik (Czechoslovak Minister to Poland), Štefan Osuský (Czechoslovak Minister to France) or Vladimír Hurban (Czechoslovak Minister to the United States), rejected the possibility to serve the Slovak state, remained

abroad and later joined Edvard Beneš's movement in Great Britain for the restoration of Czechoslovakia.

There was also the domestic opposition in Slovakia. The opposition was formed first of all from the members of the pro-Czechoslovak political parties, mainly from the Agrarian Party and Social Democratic Party. The Lutheran Church was also critical of the new regime led by a priest and trying to realize the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Part of the opposition, mainly former social democrats and agrarians, maintained contacts with the Czechoslovak government in exile in London and was ready to accept the restoration of Czechoslovakia, usually under the condition that it would be federalized. Others were thinking about an independent Slovakia, but with democratic freedoms. The communists did not have a clear position at first. In 1940 they started to advocate first for a socialist independent Slovakia and later even for a 'Soviet Slovakia'.²⁰

The Slovak Army

The attempts to build separate Slovak military units under the command of Slovak officers within the framework of the Czechoslovak armed forces already existed in the period of autonomy (i.e. between 6 October 1938 and 14 March 1939). The government in Prague refused such demands, but since many conscripts and officers of Slovak nationality were allowed to serve in Slovakia this later enabled the relatively fast forming of Slovak army units. Already in this period HSLS had a party militia called the Hlinka Guard (*Hlinkova garda* – HG). The HG-men (*gardisti*) belonged to the radical separatists among HSLS, and later became known for their terrorist acts against Czechs, Jews and opponents of the regime. The units of the newly established Slovak army and the volunteers of the HG took part in the 'small war' against Hungary in March 1939 (see above). However, army officers considered the HG as dangerous fanatics with little training and ardently opposed their inclusion in the armed forces. Furthermore, Tiso did not like them for their radicalism. Only in autumn of 1944, after the suppression of the Slovak National Uprising, did the HG (which took part in the suppression), become part of the Slovak armed forces.

At its beginning the newly established Slovak army was only a smaller copy of the Czechoslovak army, which the Germans had just dissolved. The 'departure' from the Czechoslovak model (new ranks, new emblems

²⁰ Anna Josko, The Slovak Resistance Movement. In: Radimír Luža – Victor Mamatey (eds.): *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic*, pp. 362–83.

and symbols etc.) was a relatively long process. The army at the beginning used the Czechoslovak uniforms and was equipped mainly with the same weapons and machinery which were later partly replaced by German models. Like the Czechoslovak Army it was based on a conscript system and compulsory military service for all able-bodied men, usually for two years. Reservists, men who had already completed their regular service, could be summoned for military training and, in the case of a national emergency, for additional service.²¹ The main problem of the Slovak army was a lack of officers. In August 1938 there were only 435 officers of the Slovak nationality in the Czechoslovak army, which constituted just 3.4 per cent of the officer corps.²² Some officers of the Czech nationality, mainly those who had Slovak wives, were allowed to continue their service in the Slovak army and some ethnic Germans, also former Czechoslovak officers, were likewise accepted. New officers were recruited from amongst reservists, some against their will. A Slovak military academy was opened in Banská Bystrica, and command schools in Bratislava and Nitra. In July 1939 the Slovak army had 29,683 men, in February 1940 33,741 (including 1,010 officers) and in June 1941 33,676 men, including 1,347 officers, 42 of them Czechs.²³ Jews, according to the governmental decree of 21 June 1939, served only in the military labour units and the same applied to Roma (gypsies). Ethnic Germans living in Slovakia, who were Slovak citizens, served first in the Slovak army in special units, but were later allowed to fulfil their military service in the German army or SS. In 1944 their service in the SS became mandatory.

As one would expect, the Slovak officer corps reflected different political opinions. Certainly, there were officers devoted to the cause of Slovak independence and even to the close cooperation of Slovakia with Nazi Germany.²⁴ Generally speaking, however, Slovak officers were usually not adherents of the *ľudák* regime and were indifferent to the idea of an independent Slovakia or even openly hostile. Some Slovak officers even joined the resistance movement. The Czech underground organization National Defence (*Obrana národa* – ON), which was based in the Protectorate but operated in Slovakia with the support of Slovak officers, specialized in sabotage and military intelligence. The reason for

²¹ František Cséfalvay et al., *Vojenské dejiny Slovenska* [Military History of Slovakia] V. 1939–1945. Bratislava: Magnet Press, 2008, pp. 16–24.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 22–3.

²⁴ František Cséfalvay et al., *Vojenské osobnosti dejín Slovenska 1939–1945* [Military personalities of History of Slovakia 1939–1945]. Bratislava: Vojenský historický ústav [Institute of Military History], 2013, pp. 153–4, 197–8, 250–1.

such behaviour was rather simple; former Czechoslovak officers, who had graduated from the Czechoslovak military schools (most notably at the Military Academy in Hranice), were educated with pro-democratic values. Professional Slovak officers before 1938 were often stationed in Czech lands and took Czech wives.²⁵ They were therefore integrated into the Czech secular milieu. Some former Czechoslovak officers of Slovak nationality belonged to the so-called legionaries, volunteers who had fought in the First World War for an independent Czechoslovakia.²⁶ The ex-legionaries formed the elite of the interwar Czechoslovak army. It is true that even among them supporters of the Ľudák regime existed (like General Ferdinand Čatloš), but, in principle, former legionaries were rather hostile to it. Some even deserted from the Slovak army and joined the Czechoslovak army formed abroad. This was the case with General Rudolf Viest, the only general of Slovak nationality who escaped to Paris and subsequently became the commander of the Czechoslovak army in France. This army fought the Germans on the western front in May and June 1940 and, after the allied defeat, the remnants fled to Great Britain.

Slovakia in the War Against Poland

The Treaty of Protection in fact meant that Slovakia could be forced to participate in a war alongside Germany, if the German government so decided. On 21 August the German Foreign Office prepared a *Note verbale* informing the Slovak Government that German armed forces would enter Slovakia to protect Slovakia from the danger of Polish attack.²⁷ The content of the note (approved by Adolf Hitler) was presented to the Slovak Government first unofficially by the German minister to Slovakia Hans Bernard, on 24 August 1939.²⁸ The government was also asked to take part in the military operations against Poland (the government was assured that the Slovak army would not be used outside Slovak territory,²⁹ but this promise was not fulfilled). In exchange, Germany

²⁵ Pavel Mičianik, *Slovenská armáda v ťažení proti Sovietskému zväzu (1941–1944). I. V operácii Barbarossa*. [Slovak Army in the Campaign against the Soviet Union. 1941–1944. Part I. In the Operation Barbarossa]. (Hereafter cited as Mičianik, I.) Banská Bystrica: Dali-BB, 2007, pp. 30–1.

²⁶ The Czechoslovak legions were formed during the First World War from the prisoners of war of the Austrian-Hungarian army of Czech and Slovak nationality and also the Czech and Slovak volunteers living in Entente states (mainly Russia and France) or neutral states (mainly the United States up to 1917). The legions were formed in Russia, Italy and France. The legions in Russia also later fought against the Red Army in the Civil War.

²⁷ SBDB I., doc. 202, pp. 576–7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, doc. 209, pp. 589–90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, doc. 205, p. 583.

promised to guarantee the Slovak-Hungarian border. If Poland was defeated, Slovakia would regain the territories lost in the fall of 1938, and eventually also those which were lost to Poland already in 1920.³⁰ After a short hesitation the Slovak government accepted the German requirements. After that the German request was presented again officially on 27 August and the Slovak government consented the next day.³¹ Mobilization in fact already started on 26 August and gradually 117,000 reservists were mobilized, of which about 51,000 were sent to the so-called '*Bernolák*'³² field army under General Ferdinand Čatloš. While the main military operations were carried out by the Wehrmacht, which launched the attack on Poland in part from Slovak soil, three Slovak divisions between 3 and 5 September crossed the border and occupied territory on the Polish side of the High Tatra Mountains. By the end of September Poland, having also been attacked by the Red Army, was defeated and the Slovak army returned to Slovakia having never formally declared war.

The Slovak government presented the war against Poland as a struggle for liberation of the territories which were annexed to Poland not only in the autumn of 1938, but also already in 1920 and 1924 (lower Orava, Lower Spiš and part of Javorina in the High Tatra Mountains). Germany formally returned these territories to Slovakia on 21 November 1939.³³ They were inhabited partly by the ethnic Slovaks and so the war obtained some justification. Pro-German elements in HSLS, and especially the HG, welcomed the defeat of Poland. Generally speaking, however, the war was not so popular among the Slovaks because many of them considered the Poles fellow Slavs. The war was extremely unpopular among the Slovak Lutherans in the western part of the country.

Preparations for the War Against the USSR

After the defeat of Poland Germany did not require further Slovak participation in German operations. After France was defeated in June of 1940, Berlin had a 'free hand' to purge the Slovak government of 'unreliable elements'. It was in this phase, as explained earlier, that Ferdinand Ďurčanský, who had tried to negotiate with the British was replaced. The new government, with Tuka and Mach in leading roles, oriented

³⁰ *Ibid.*, doc. 210, pp. 590–1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, doc. 216, pp. 604–5, p. 610.

³² Anton Bernolák (1762–1813) was a Slovak linguist and Catholic priest. He was the author of the first Slovak language standard.

³³ SDBD, I., doc. 251, pp. 683–4.

definitively and exclusively on Germany. On 24 November 1940 Slovakia, together with Hungary and Romania, joined the Tripartite Pact.³⁴ In April 1941 Slovakia did not participate in the campaign against Yugoslavia and Greece. On the other hand, when the war started on 6 April, Bratislava severed diplomatic relations with Belgrade and on 10 April expressed a willingness to recognize the new independent Croatian state.

On 21 June 1941 the Chief of the German General Staff, General Franz Halder, visited Bratislava incognito. He informed the head of the German military mission in Slovakia, General Paul von Otto, that Hitler expected the participation of the Slovak army in the war against the Soviet Union.³⁵ On the following day, 22 June 1941, the war started. The German minister to Slovakia, Hans Eluard Ludin, visited Tiso and Tuka to present them with the German request for Slovakian participation. Tuka agreed and offered military aid.³⁶ On the same day diplomatic relations between the USSR and Slovakia were broken off³⁷ and Defence Minister General Ferdinand Čatloš ordered reservists to report for 'extraordinary military training'. Only on 24 June did the government approve participation in the war, which was then officially announced by radio broadcast. The Diet, which according to the constitution was the only body competent to declare war, was not even informed. Accordingly therefore, the whole action was unconstitutional. Similarly, on 13 December 1941 when the Slovak government formally declared war on Great Britain and the United States,³⁸ the Diet was not consulted. Yet because the United States and Great Britain did not recognize Slovakia as an independent state they paid no attention to the declaration of war. Indeed no direct fighting took place between the Slovak army and the Western allies, although Slovakia was treated as an enemy territory and repeatedly bombed in 1944.

According to the unpublished memoirs of Ferdinand Čatloš, initially only Tuka and Mach advocated immediate participation in the war against the Soviet Union, while other ministers as well as President Tiso expressed some doubts. Nevertheless, after a brief period of hesitation all agreed.³⁹ Despite the fact that it was Germany who pressured Slovakia

³⁴ SDBD, I., doc. 359, pp. 270–2.

³⁵ SDBD, I. doc. 400, p. 1092.

³⁶ Eduard Nižňanský et al. (eds), *Slovensko-nemecké vzťahy 1941–1945 v dokumentech/ Slovakisch-deutsche Beziehungen in Dokumenten 1941–1945*. II. (hereafter cited as SDBD II.) Prešov: Universum, 2011, doc. 1, p. 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, doc. 3, p. 98.

³⁸ SDBS II., doc. 34, p. 184.

³⁹ Archív literatúry a umenia Slovenskej národnej knižnice (ALU SNK) [Archives of the Literature and Arts of the Slovak National Library] in Martin, memoirs of Ferdinand Čatloš, sig. 129 E2, pp. 65–6.

to make an offer of 'military assistance', it must be said that the Slovak government had no objections. The government saw participation in the war as a good opportunity to show to Berlin that Slovakia was a better friend of Germany than Hungary, which also took part in the military campaign. Tuka and Tiso, the latter having overcome his initial hesitation, wanted to contribute more and faster. They believed that it would only be possible to revise the First Vienna Arbitrary Award with German backing and this demanded an openly anti-communist stance.⁴⁰

The Beginning of the Campaign Against the USSR

The mobilization of Slovak reservists lasted until 5 July, by which time some 68,018 men had been called up, of whom 56,858 actually registered at their military units. The total size of the Slovak army reached 90,533 men. Once again General Ferdinand Čatloš took command of the assembling army group (*armádna skupina*) in eastern Slovakia. It consisted of two divisions, the 1st Division, commanded by Colonel Jozef Turanec, and the 2nd Division, commanded by Colonel Augustin Malár. From elements of the 2nd Division Čatloš formed an independent military unit known as the 'Mobile Group' (*rychlá skupina*) under the command of Colonel Rudolf Pilfousek (an ethnic German but, judging by his name, probably partly of Czech ancestry). The Mobile Group was the only almost fully motorized Slovak military unit with specialized weaponry as well as tanks. It was expected to advance at the same speed as the advancing German forces.

The Slovak forces were at first stationed in North-eastern Slovakia, near the border of occupied Poland (the General Government). Slovakia did not border the Soviet Union, but after the beginning of the war Slovak forces crossed the Polish border and assembled near Brzozów. Only later did they cross the River San, the nearby border between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Slovak divisions, including the Mobile Group, were subordinated to Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group South. Within this army group the infantry divisions were committed to security duties in the rear area, while the Mobile Group was initially attached to the Seventeenth Army of General Carl Heinrich von Stülpnagel. The Seventeenth Army was to cross the San River and break through the so-called Molotov defensive line,⁴¹ an incomplete chain of defences built along the new Soviet western border (established after the

⁴⁰ Ľubomír Lipták: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. [Slovakia in the 20th Century]*. 2nd edn (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1998), p. 189.

⁴¹ Mičianik, I., pp. 59–61.

defeat of Poland). Before Slovak mobilization was even complete, the Mobile Group crossed the San on 25 June and advanced toward Sambor. On 1 July the Soviet army started the retreat to the so-called Stalin line, a chain of fortresses built on the old (pre-17 September 1939) Soviet-Polish border. This allowed the advancing Seventeenth Army to continue its attack with the Mobile Group ordered to clear the territory south of Lvov. On 2 July the Mobile Group captured the undefended town of Stryj (60 km south of Lvov) without a shot being fired.⁴²

On 7 July the Mobile Group, which was temporally subordinated to General Čatloš, was reorganized into the Mobile Brigade with 195 officers, 4,655 men and a company of forty-three tanks. The next day (8 July) it started to move eastward alongside the main axis of advance, Sambor–Ternopol–Vinnyca. On 19 July the Seventeenth Army broke through the Stalin line and the Mobile Brigade obtained the order to conquer Lypovec, a small town about 50 km east of Vinnyca on the main road to Bila Cerkva and Kiev. The attack started on 22 July, but Pilfousek's tanks did not have enough fuel or ammunition, forcing them to stop in the village of Ščaslyva, west of the town. Pilfousek then made a fatal mistake ordering the infantry to continue the attack. His soldiers reached the centre of the town, but here they were met by a major counterattack by the Soviet Twelfth Army, which sent 15,000 men to reconquer Lypovec. The Slovaks were not able to hold the town without tanks and, in spite of artillery support, which decimated the attackers, it was only the arrival of German reinforcements that saved the Mobile Brigade from total defeat. Seventy-five Slovak soldiers were killed, 167 were wounded and nineteen were taken prisoner. The Mobile Brigade lost four tanks, one armored car and tens of trucks. Next day, on 23 July, Lypovec was occupied by the German 295th Infantry Division.⁴³

The Mobile Brigade had in fact been defeated and General Ferdinand Čatloš ordered it to return most of its armoured vehicles to Slovakia. Most of the soldiers remained in the Vinnyca region. Only a small Slovak unit of the Mobile Brigade continued the attack with the 295th Infantry Division and on 30 July reached Granovo, west of the Dnieper River. After that even these soldiers were sent back to Vinnyca.

Slovak propaganda presented the defeat at Lypovec as a 'great victory' and also as a 'symbol of Slovak-German friendship in arms'. In 1942 a granite monument was erected on the battlefield and a Slovak military cemetery was situated there. About 600 hundred Slovak soldiers, who died in the fighting against the Soviet Union (not only at the battle

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 62–83.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 121–37.



Figure 4.1 Soldiers of the Slovakian Mobile Brigade at the battle of Lypovec (end of July 1941).

of Lypovec) are buried here. Remarkably, the monument survived the Soviet era and still exists.

The First and Second Slovak Infantry Divisions, formed partly from reservists who were mobilized at the end of June, were concentrated first near Medzilaborce in northeastern Slovakia and later moved to the region of Sanok and Chyrov in occupied Poland. Owing to a lack of motorization the troops moved slowly into the Soviet Union because usually they had to march. They were used in July mainly to ‘clean’ regions in eastern Galicia (south of the line Rava Ruska–Ternopol) from the dispersed units of defeated Soviet armies.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–53.

The Mobile Division 1941–1943

After the defeat of the Mobile Brigade at Lypovec, General Čatloš decided to reorganize the Slovak forces. On 25 July 1941 two new divisions were formed; the Mobile Division (*rýchla divízia* – RD), which was in fact a strengthened Mobile Brigade, and the Security Division (*Zaistovacia divízia* – ZD) which was to serve in occupied Ukraine. Their main area of operations was in the region around Zhytomyr about 130 km west of Kiev. While at the beginning of war the Slovak government was keen to emphasize the country's high proportional participation in the war, now the situation changed. Most of the reservists, mobilized at the end of June and beginning of July for Čatloš's army group (1st and 2nd Infantry Division), were sent home. By autumn 1941 the number of soldiers had fallen to only about one third of the total in July 1941. The RD and the ZD were now formed mainly from professional soldiers and conscript soldiers serving their compulsory two-year military service; the reservists only formed about 17 per cent of the total number. They were mainly specialists of various occupations. On 10 September 8,862 men served in the ZD,⁴⁵ while the RD on 20 August numbered 8,451 men (including 301 officers).⁴⁶

Despite its name the Mobile Division, commanded by Colonel Turanec, was not fully motorized; however, its small motorized contingent took part at the battle of Kiev in August and September 1941. After the fall of Kiev (20 September 1941) the RD moved south, being incorporated into the 1st Panzer Group (later 1st Panzer Army) of Colonel-General Ewald von Kleist. The RD fought successfully in the Donbas Area and at the end of October reached Rostov and the Sea of Azov. By this time the RD had been reduced in size (only partly due to casualties) to 287 officers and 7,081 men, but worse was to come as the Slovak soldiers were not prepared for the winter, which started in the middle of November.⁴⁷

On 27 November 1941 Colonel Turanec was replaced by Colonel Augustin Malár. The new commander was struck by the division's poor morale and lack of discipline, which of course affected its ability to fight. Malár wanted to send the division back to Slovakia, but this was refused by the German high command because of the start of the Soviet

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245. See also: P. Mičianik: *Slovenská armáda v ťažení proti Sovietskému svazu (1941–1944). II. Zaisťovacia divízia a železniční pionieri*. [Security Division and Railway Pioneers]. (Hereafter cited as Mičianik, II.) Banská Bystrica: Dal-BB, 2008, p. 37.

⁴⁶ Mičianik, I., p. 191.

⁴⁷ P. Mičianik: *Slovenská armáda v ťažení proti Sovietskému svazu (1941–1944). III. Rýchla divízia [Fast Division]*. (Hereafter cited as Mičianik, III.) Banská Bystrica: Dal-BB, 2009.

counteroffensive at the end of November. On 28 November the Soviet army reconquered Rostov and the 1st Panzer Army retreated behind the River Mius, where the RD defended positions near to the town of Golodajevka. Here the Soviet counteroffensive was successfully stopped, an achievement which earned Colonel Malár promotion to the rank of General and later the German Iron Cross. By the end of 1941 the RD had suffered eighty-four killed, 378 wounded or frostbitten, twenty-six missing and eleven captured.⁴⁸

At the beginning of March the snow started to melt and the Mius overflowed its banks. The flood put an end to the Soviet winter offensive and for the next six weeks the front where the RD was stationed was relatively quiet, although losses continued. Between 1 January and the end of April the RD lost another 143 men (124 killed, twelve missing and seven captured).⁴⁹ On 25 April 1942 Turanec, having been promoted to the rank of General, returned to again take command of the RD. The Mobile Division took part first in the battle of Kharkov in the spring and then in the German summer offensive (Operation Blue), which started on 28 June 1942. At the end of July the RD had participated in the reconquest of Rostov (for which Turanec obtained the Iron Cross).⁵⁰ By this point Army Group South had been split into two separate army groups, designated 'A', which was directed south into the Caucasus and included the Slovak RD, and 'B', which ominously was directed towards Stalingrad.

On 19 November 1942, the Red Army launched Operation Uranus, a two-pronged offensive targeting the weaker Romanian and Hungarian forces protecting the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad. Here the Axis forces were soon cut off and surrounded. By Christmas 1942 it had become clear that most of Army Group B in the Stalingrad pocket had no chance of breaking out and that the Soviet army would soon launch another offensive against the German and Slovak forces in the Caucasus. On 16 January 1943 this new Soviet counteroffensive began and after some difficult fighting, including partial encirclement in the village of Pencenskaja, the RD was evacuated to Crimea and Perekop. During the operations in the Caucasus the RD had sustained 108 killed, 207 wounded and 157 missing or captured.⁵¹

During 1943 the RD lost all ability to fight due to plummeting morale and rising defections. The RD had lost almost all its tanks and

⁴⁸ F. Cséfalvay et al., *Vojenské osobnosti dejín Slovenska 1939–1945*, pp. 80–7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ P. Mičianik, III, pp. 118–24.

⁵¹ Cséfalvay, *Vojenské dejiny Slovenska*, p. 132.

armoured cars in the Caucasus and, as a result, was reorganized into the 1st Infantry Division on 1 August 1943. Yet on the night of 29 October the Red Army attacked the division at Melitopol and large numbers of the Slovak soldiers decided not to fight. Some 2,300 men and forty-five officers were taken prisoner. The German high command lost confidence in the Slovak 1st Division and argued that most of it should be used only for labour. General Čatloš agreed and on 4 May 1944 the bulk of the division was re-designated the 1st Technical Division and moved to Romania and later to Hungary.

Between 1941 and 1943 the various iterations of this formation incurred at least 600 dead, 2,400 wounded, 398 missing and eighty-eight captured. Only forty-two men deserted to the Red Army. From a military point of view, it belonged to the elite of the Slovak army and even the German command was satisfied with it.

The Security Division

The Security Division was stationed in northern Ukraine and south Belarus where it was charged with protecting roads and railways, especially the line between Pinsk and Gomel, against attacks from partisans. At the end of 1941 the majority of guerrilla fighters belonged to Ukrainian nationalists, later known as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and former soldiers of the Red Army who had been caught behind German lines. The Ukrainian nationalists also fought against the Red Army for an independent Ukrainian state, but when the German authorities rejected this idea the UPA started to target German troops as well. Generally speaking, however, Slovak units did not have much contact with the UPA.

Only at the end of 1942 and mainly in 1943 did the Slovak area of operations see large numbers of Soviet partisans. The attitude toward partisans of the officers and soldiers of the Slovak 2nd Division was rather complicated. Regiments, battalions and even companies were scattered in different places across an area almost as big as Slovakia. Very often units of a single battalion were situated along the railway lines many kilometres from each other. It is difficult therefore to generalize about relationships between the Slovaks, the local civil population and different partisan groups. On the one hand, units of the 102nd Regiment took part in brutal 'pacification' actions against Soviet partisans with special battalions destroying several villages suspected of supporting partisans. In so-called 'punishable expeditions' the commander of the regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Michal Lokšík, was especially active and the excesses of his men extended to executing captured partisans and

civilian suspects.⁵² By contrast the situation in the 101st Regiment was very different. Here most of the officers turned a blind eye when their soldiers established friendly relations with the local population. Yet some commanders in far-flung locations, even up to battalion-sized formations, concluded unofficial armistices with the Soviet partisans. There were also instances of Slovak soldiers defecting to the partisans. Captain Ján Nálepka, Chief of Staff of the 101st Regiment, established contact with the partisan leader General Saburov. When this activity was discovered, he defected on 15 May 1943 with two other officers and organized the 1st Czechoslovak Partisan Unit. When Nálepka died in a raid on 16 November 1943, he was posthumously awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union.⁵³ Generally speaking, however, desertions to the partisans were not very numerous, altogether about 400 Slovak soldiers changed sides during the war.⁵⁴

Increasingly the desertions had military consequences; the German command considered the Security Division unreliable and unable (or unwilling) to fight against the partisans and decided to remove it from the Ukrainian-Belorussian borderland. As with the Mobile Division the Security Division was eventually transformed into a labour unit under the name 2nd Technical Brigade (later 2nd Technical Division). The number of soldiers at the end of October was reduced to 3,413 men who were under the command of Colonel Ján Krnáč and sent to work in Italy.

The Attitude of the Soldiers to the War

Slovaks as a nation had no personal experience with Russia or the Soviet Union. Slovakia had never in the past shared a border with Russian or Soviet territory and except for some Russian 'white' émigrés, there were no Russians in Slovakia. During the First World War many Slovaks fought in the Austro-Hungarian army on the eastern front, but the war was not popular among Czechs and Slovaks and many defected to the Russians and later formed the Czechoslovak legions fighting for independence. In Slovakia, there were traditional pro-Russian sympathies dating back to the nineteenth century based on a common Slavic origin

⁵² Cséfalvay et al., *Vojenské osobnosti dejín Slovenska*, pp. 153–4. Lokšík, who was born in 1897 in Vienna, was reassigned in November 1942 and then forcibly retired from the Slovak Army in 1944. He later claimed to be an ethnic German and joined Waffen-SS. After the war he escaped from Slovakia and his fate remains unknown.

⁵³ Cséfalvay, *Vojenské osobnosti dejín Slovenska*, p. 176. In 2004 Ján Nálepka was in memoriam promoted to the rank of brigade-general.

⁵⁴ Martin Lacko, *Dezercie a zajatia príslušníkov zaistovacej divízie v ZSSR v rokoch 1942–1943* (Bratislava: ÚPN, 2007), p. 63.

and proximity in language. Unlike in Poland, Hungary or Romania, Russians were not viewed as rivals in Slovakia, but rather viewed favourably. Despite its communist regime, Czechoslovakia, like France, signed a treaty of alliance with the USSR in 1935. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia acted legally until its dissolution in the autumn of 1938 and was quite strong and influential in Slovakia. Before the war many Slovak soldiers were members of the party and were often willing to accept the picture of the USSR as a 'worker's paradise'. For all these reasons the war against the Soviet Union was not popular among the Slovak population. On the other hand, it must be said that most of the mobilized Slovak soldiers served loyally in the Slovak army, although with little real enthusiasm.

Justifying the war was a big problem for official Slovak propaganda. While the 'small war' against Hungary in March 1939 was popular because the army was defending Slovak territory, and the war against Poland could be at least justified as a fight for territories annexed by Poland, there was no reason for the conflict with the USSR. Relations between Slovakia and the USSR had been good, despite the openly anti-communist course of the Slovak government. Slovaks saw no reason why they should fight Ukrainians and Russians for the interest of Germany. Officially, the war was directed against 'Jewish Bolshevism', not against Russians or the Russian nation. On 26 June 1941 General Ferdinand Čatloš declared openly: 'This is not a struggle against the Russian nation or against Slavdom ... The struggle is for a new Europe where the Russian nation will also find a better future.' Čatloš also emphasized the tradition of anti-Bolshevik struggle by the Czechoslovak legions during the Civil War in Russia.⁵⁵

After crossing the San, the Slovak soldiers found themselves on the former territory of eastern Poland, which had been annexed to the Soviet Union only in autumn 1939. Except for the communists, the local population did not consider the USSR as their motherland and had no intention of defending it. The local Ukrainian population hated Soviet rule and often welcomed German troops as liberators. Slovaks were welcomed even more cordially because due to the similarity in language they were able to conduct basic communication directly with the locals. The Slovak soldiers were also confronted with the reality of Soviet rule; dire poverty, terrible roads and churches turned to grain magazines, public halls or simply destroyed. They also faced the evidence of mass Soviet terror when they found hundreds of dead

⁵⁵ Dagmar Černá-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ*. Bratislava: Veda, 2002, s. 186.

bodies in the yards and cells of prisons in the towns near the border. These were the bodies of political prisoners who were executed by Soviet security forces before the retreat of the Red Army (the total number of those executed is today estimated to be around 15,000). All these experiences improved the morale of the Slovak soldiers who were made to feel like liberators bringing freedom and better life to the Ukrainian people. This, however, did not last for long. Very soon the Slovak soldiers were confronted by the atrocities committed by the advancing German forces against Ukrainian and Russian civilians, and especially by the *Einsatzgruppen* which mass murdered Jews. Already in central and eastern Ukraine, the local population did not welcome the Germans as liberators, but instead stubbornly opposed them. While Slovak morale and the ability to fight was evident in 1941, it was lost in the severe winter fighting of 1942 and 1943. During 1943 it became clear that Germany could not win the war and that the Slovaks had no reason to endure further sacrifices.

The Slovak government gradually also lost its enthusiasm for the war. It became clear that the war would be long and could exhaust Slovakia's human and economic reserves. Because Hungary also took part in the war, it was highly unlikely that Germany would pressure Budapest to return to Slovakia even part of its territory. In this situation it was decided to limit the Slovak participation to a necessary minimum. Indeed the number of soldiers serving in both divisions in the Soviet Union was constantly being reduced.

Political Consequences of the War Against the USSR

Slovak participation in the war against the USSR had its political consequences. On 8 July 1941 the Soviet Ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky, announced to the exiled Czechoslovak President, Edvard Beneš, that a restitution of Czechoslovakia was one of the war aims of the USSR and that the Soviet government recognized the Czechoslovak government *de jure*. On 18 July 1941 the Czechoslovak-Soviet Alliance Treaty of 16 May 1935 was renewed and the Soviet Union agreed to the formation of a Czechoslovak Army within the Soviet Union. The nucleus of this army was the Czechoslovak Legion, established in Poland in the summer of 1939, which was later captured and disarmed by the Soviets after Poland's defeat. Recruits were taken from Czechoslovak refugees and political dissidents who had illegally crossed the border into the Soviet Union (such people were usually found by the NKVD and sent to the labour camps for a minimum of two years). The new Soviet-backed Czechoslovak Army also

took Slovak soldiers who had been taken prisoner or who voluntarily defected to the Red Army.

The turn in the war in 1943 changed the position of many Slovaks toward the regime in Bratislava. More and more people in Slovakia realized that the regime which had discredited itself by the deportation of the Jews and by fighting on the side of Nazi Germany would not be acceptable to the anti-Hitler coalition. From the spring of 1944 it became clear that the Slovak state would not outlive the end of the war because Edvard Beneš and his government in London had been recognized by the Allies in 1940–1. The Ľudák regime fell into a deep crisis, resulting in the almost total paralysis of the state authorities and security forces. Most of the state officials, including members of the security forces, started working on an ‘alibi’ because they wanted to remain in state service after the war. In the spring and summer of 1944 partisans were dropped by the Soviet air force into eastern and central Slovakia to start organizing local resistance. Many local Slovaks, especially communists and their sympathizers, joined them. Soon they were destroying railways, bridges and any other infrastructure of military utility. Later there were even some killings of local Germans, but such actions remained rare because except for the Zone of Protection there were no German troops in Slovakia. Accordingly, the only force left to deal with the new partisan menace was the Slovak *gendarmérie*, which was woefully inadequate for such a task, meaning the partisans faced practically no resistance. In desperation, on 13 August 1944 the Slovak government declared martial law throughout the country, but without the means to implement it the order existed only on paper. On 29 August German troops entered Slovakia and the Slovak army revolted. The insurgent army of 60,000 was able to resist German forces for two months. After the uprising was suppressed at the end of October, the German army occupied all of Slovakia, despite the fact that Slovakia formally remained an independent country. On 4 April 1945 the Soviet army liberated Bratislava and Slovakia was reincorporated into Czechoslovakia.

The Attitude Toward the Slovak Participation in the War Against the USSR After the Second World War

After 1945 Slovak participation in the war against the Soviet Union and (formally) also the other allies was considered one of the biggest crimes of the wartime regime. It goes without saying that the communist regime, which lasted in Czechoslovakia for forty-one years (1948–89), made no excuses for it. The Slovak exiles, the prominent personalities

of the Slovak state who managed to escape to the west during the first part of the Cold War, sometimes tried to present the war as Slovakia's fight against Communism.⁵⁶ Later, in the 1960s, this explanation was abandoned and Slovak participation was explained rather as a result of German pressure.⁵⁷ Today, however, in a democratic and independent Slovakia, the participation is simply considered a national shame.

⁵⁶ Jozef Paučo, *Slováci a komunizmus [Slovaks and Communism]* (Middletown, PA: Jednota Press, 1957), pp. 107–11, Andrej Činčura: *Duch slovenskej armády [The Spirit of Slovak Army]*. In: Mikuláš Šprinc (ed.): *Slovenská republika 1939–1949 [The Slovak Republic, 1939–1949]* (Scranton, PA: Jednota Press, 1949), pp. 130–2.

⁵⁷ Milan Stanislav Ďurica: *Slovakia During World War II. The Slovak Republic*. In: Joseph M. Kirchbaum: *Slovakia in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Toronto: Slovak World Congress, 1973), p. 183.

Thomas Schlemmer

The Decision to Intervene on the Eastern Front

It was Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano who awakened Benito Mussolini with a telephone call in the early morning hours of 22 June 1941 to tell his father-in-law, then at his seaside retreat, that Hitler had officially informed his alliance partner that the Wehrmacht had launched an attack on the Soviet Union.¹ No consultations had taken place between the two Axis powers; the German Reich presented Italy with a *fait accompli*, although this line of action was blatantly contrary to ‘the spirit and the letter of the “Pact of Steel” of 22 May 1939’.² Mussolini nonetheless did not hesitate for a moment to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Germans; at daybreak, Italy too was at war with the Soviet Union.

The sheer swiftness of this reaction by the Duce demonstrates that the German invasion of the USSR had not taken him by surprise – regardless of the fact that Italy had at no time been included in the preparations for Operation Barbarossa. The hints that Mussolini had been receiving since late 1940 from the agents of his military secret service, the Italian military attachés in Berlin, Moscow and Bucharest, as well as politicians in friendly states and increasingly even from German quarters,³ grew in strength and eventually sufficed to give him a fairly clear picture of the plans of his ally beyond the Alps. In May 1941, then, there was not only certainty in Rome that war between the German Reich and the Soviet Union was inevitable, but also information about the time of attack, the

¹ This chapter was translated from German by Kathleen Luft.

² Jürgen Förster, ‘Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion bis zur Jahreswende 1941/42: Die Entscheidungen der “Dreierpaktstaaten”’, in: Horst Boog et al., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart 1983), pp. 883–907, here 897; on the conveyance of Hitler’s message to Mussolini cf. Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937–1943*, edited by Renzo De Felice (Milan, 2000), p. 526, entry for 22 June 1942.

³ In part, however, this was deliberate disinformation; cf. *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil II: Diktate 1941–1945*, vol. 1, *Juli–September 1941*, edited by Elke Fröhlich (Munich, 1996), p. 44, entry for 10 July 1941.

operational plans and the strategic objectives.⁴ The campaign, as military attaché Efisio Marras reported from Berlin, was expected to take place between July and September, to last for approximately two and a half months and to culminate in the occupation of Leningrad, Moscow, the entire Ukraine and the oil fields of the Caucasus.⁵ When the two dictators met on 2 June at the Brenner Pass to confer about the political and military situation, the topic of the Soviet Union could not be avoided. On this occasion, if one is to believe Joseph Goebbels, Mussolini was given a rough outline of Germany's intentions in this regard,⁶ and obviously he did nothing to dissuade Hitler from his scheme.⁷ On the contrary, he pressed for a 'final solution of the Russian question', whereupon Hitler left no doubt that this could be accomplished exclusively by military means.

At that time, however, Mussolini was already determined not to leave the war in the East solely to the Germans, although they had signalled that they intended to wage this war without the Italians, indeed that they had, in the face of the Balkan Campaign in the spring of 1941, made an outright 'change of allies'.⁸ As early as 30 May Mussolini had instructed his Chief of the General Staff, Ugo Cavallero, to prepare three divisions for deployment in the Soviet Union; should conflict ensue between the German Reich and the USSR, he gave General Cavallero to understand, Italy could not stand on the sidelines, because it ultimately was a question of a 'battle against communism'.⁹ The fact that it had to do with more than a merely symbolic presence was plainly conveyed by the very choice of the divisions scheduled to be sent to the Eastern Front. From the outset, only elite troops and units with the highest possible mobility were under discussion, that is, components of the Royal Army which were particularly scarce and precious. After all, at that time the Italian

⁴ Cf. Gerhard Schreiber, 'Italiens Teilnahme am Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion. Motive, Fakten und Folgen', in: Jürgen Förster (ed.), *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol* (Munich/Zurich, 1993), pp. 250–92, here 252f., and *Le operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo (1941–1943)*, edited by Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (Rome, 2000), pp. 33–7.

⁵ The telegram from Efisio Marras to the Ministry of War in Rome, dated 7 May 1941, and his detailed report of 30 May 1941 are reproduced in *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, pp. 519–22.

⁶ *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil I: Aufzeichnungen 1923–1941*, vol. 9, *Dezember 1940–Juli 1941*, edited by Elke Fröhlich (Munich, 1998), p. 395, entry for 22 June 1941.

⁷ Cf. *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie D: 1937–1941*, vol. 13/1, *23. Juni bis 14. September 1941* (Göttingen, 1970), pp. 7ff. (the following quotation is on p. 7): Benito Mussolini to Adolf Hitler, 23 June 1941.

⁸ Förster, 'Entscheidungen der "Dreierpaktstaaten"', p. 897.

⁹ Ugo Cavallero, *Diario 1940–1943*, edited by Giuseppe Bucciante (Rome, 1984), p. 188, entry for 30 May 1941.

armed forces possessed only three incomplete armoured divisions and three 'fast' divisions as well as two motorized infantry divisions and a handful of infantry divisions that were trained for transport with motor vehicles.¹⁰ Several of these divisions, moreover, were in North Africa. It was thus quite significant that the *Comando Supremo*, after examining several options, decided on 19 June to designate for deployment in the Soviet Union the *Corpo d'Armata autotrasportabile*, commanded by General Francesco Zingales, with one fast division and two infantry divisions that were classed as *autotrasportabili*, movable by motor vehicles.¹¹ Whilst increasingly feverish efforts were under way in Rome to assemble troops for the war in the East, General Marras was in Berlin, seeking the ally's approval. On 20 June he was able to report that the High Command of the Wehrmacht was informed of the Italian plans and proposed to deploy the expeditionary corps on the southern wing between Hungarian and Romanian forces.¹²

The die had thus already been cast, in essence, for an intervention by Italy in the war against the Soviet Union, when Hitler had the Duce informed on the night of 21 June 1941 of the opening of hostilities. Although he now officially and 'naturally, with a heart filled with gratitude', accepted Mussolini's offer to send an army corps to the Eastern Front, he made no secret of the fact that he deemed this step unnecessary and would have preferred to see Italy concentrate its energy on the war in the Mediterranean.¹³ Mussolini easily ignored these reservations, which were thoroughly justified from a military standpoint. For him, other considerations clearly had priority.

This raises the question of Mussolini's motives for engaging in the war against the Soviet Union even though the military situation of the country was strained and the traditional spheres of interest of Italy were primarily in Africa and the Balkans. The answer must address various factors that bring to light a complex cluster of motivations. First, there is Mussolini's thirst for glory, a character trait that often led him to act intuitively and drove him to plunge into adventures without considering

¹⁰ Cf. Lucio Ceva, *Storia delle Forze Armate in Italia* (Turin, 1999), annex 34.

¹¹ On this, cf. *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, pp. 71–4, and the excerpts from the war diary of Ugo Cavallero, *ibid.*, pp. 525–31.

¹² Cf. Schreiber, 'Italiens Teilnahme', p. 252. Telegrams 362/S and 363/S from General Efsio Marras to the *Comando Supremo*, dated 20 June 1941, are reproduced in: *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, p. 524.

¹³ *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie D: 1937–1941*, vol. 12/2, 6. April bis 22. Juni 1941 (Göttingen, 1969), pp. 889–92 (the quotation is to be found on p. 891): Adolf Hitler to Benito Mussolini, 21 June 1941; Mussolini's reply, dated 23 June 1941, which is mentioned below, can be found in: *ADAP 1918–1945, Serie D*, vol. 13/1, pp. 7ff.

the consequences. Second, the decision to open a new front had a strong ideological component, which the Duce himself repeatedly emphasized, keeping in mind, of course, that it also was a matter of pure power politics.¹⁴ After all, the struggle against Bolshevism was one of the guiding principles of Fascism, even though relations between Italy and the Soviet Union had traditionally been fairly good. Economic interests and the shared rejection of the post-war order in Europe that was established in 1918/19 had created the prerequisites for the two contrasting regimes to reach a *modus vivendi* and culminated in September 1933 in the signing of a nonaggression pact.¹⁵ The conquest of Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War, Italy's participation in the Anti-Comintern Pact and, finally, the German-Italian alliance nonetheless provoked a period of strained political relations between Moscow and Rome, making it difficult to adjust to the new circumstances that had arisen after the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in late August 1939. The Italian-Soviet negotiations on improvement of political and economic relations, talks that initially were favourably regarded by Berlin but were ultimately without result, cannot hide that fact.¹⁶ Mussolini's assertion that Italy could 'not stay on the side-lines' in a war that, if nothing else, was ideologically motivated was by no means an empty phrase for him. Nor did he regard as meaningless words the suggestion that the old guard of the Fascist Party had only reluctantly followed the course of rapprochement with the Soviet Union adopted in the summer of 1939 and had enthusiastically accepted the decision to 'take Russia by the throat'.¹⁷

The war against the Soviet Union thus realigned the ideological fronts, but it also had direct repercussions for the dynamics of the tension-filled German-Italian alliance. Following the debacle of the Italian campaign against Greece and the catastrophe of the 10th Army in North Africa,

¹⁴ Cf. Ciano, *Diario*, p. 530, entry for 1 July 1941.

¹⁵ Cf. Giorgio Petracchi: "‘l colosso dai piedi d'argilla’: l'URSS nell'immagine del fascismo", in: Ennio Di Nolfo, Romain H. Rainero and Brunello Viguzzi (eds.), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938–40)* (Milan, 1985), pp. 149–70; Giorgio Petracchi, 'Pinocchio, die Katze und der Fuchs: Italien zwischen Deutschland und der Sowjetunion (1939–1941)', in: Bernd Wegner (ed.), *Zwei Wege nach Moskau. Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt bis zum 'Unternehmen Barbarossa'* (Munich/Zurich, 1991), pp. 519–46.

¹⁶ Cf. Malte König, 'Unter deutscher Aufsicht. Die italienisch-sowjetischen Verhandlungen im Winter 1940/41', in: Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, Lutz Klinkhammer and Thomas Schlemmer (eds.), *Die 'Achse' im Krieg. Politik, Ideologie und Kriegführung 1939–1945* (Paderborn, 2010), pp. 176–91.

¹⁷ *ADAP 1918–1945, Serie D*, vol. 13/1, 7ff., here p. 7: Benito Mussolini to Adolf Hitler, 23 June 1941; on the reasons for Mussolini's decision see Schreiber, 'Italiens Teilnahme', in: Förster (ed.), *Stalingrad*, pp. 250–8; however, he overestimates the anti-German motives of the Duce. See also Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. L'Italia in guerra 1940–1943*, vol. 1, *Dalla guerra 'breve' alla guerra lunga* (Turin, 1996), pp. 390–400.

Italy had clearly lost importance and room for manoeuvre in this alliance in 1940/41. Mussolini's 'parallel war' with all his ambitions had definitively run aground in the inhospitable Albanian-Greek border area and in the Libyan desert; as a result, Italy was discredited as a great power – not only, but also, and most notably, in German eyes. The foreign policy decisions made by Mussolini in 1941, and hence also his decision to lead Italy into an armed conflict with the Soviet Union, must be seen against this backdrop, and they served to achieve a contradictory objective: in concert with National Socialist Germany, to implement his own imperialist policy and simultaneously to defend the autonomy of Italy against this selfsame Germany.¹⁸ In so doing, the Duce assumed that the Germans would win the war in the end and would relinquish to Italy its share in the spoils. He hoped, however, that the Germans would sustain too much damage in the Soviet Union to be able to dictate the post-war order all alone, and he hoped quite fervently that the war would last long enough for Italy to succeed in redeeming itself militarily for what it regarded as the ignominious defeats of 1940 and 1941. The deployment to the Eastern Front of an expeditionary corps that was as well equipped as possible was in particular a consequence of this 'eternal illusion', as his foreign minister and son-in-law expressed it.¹⁹

In addition, the war against the Soviet Union – and here Mussolini's considerations coincided with Hitler's – could definitely be interpreted as a strategic variant of the war against Great Britain, for after the anticipated more or less speedy victory in the East, the opportunity seemed to emerge for an attack from two sides on the British positions in the Near East and hence on a cornerstone of the British Empire. As a result, two competitors – the Soviet Union, which continued to pursue Russia's traditional policy of expansion from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and thus affected vital Italian interests, and Great Britain – would have been rendered ineffective. Both countries could have challenged Italy's dominance in the eastern Mediterranean.

In the interim, and this may well have been the most-overlooked reason for Mussolini's decision, there was speculation on spoils in the Soviet Union, for everything that was lacking in Italy was present there: grain, coal, petroleum and metallic raw materials as well as military hardware of all types, which, it was hoped, could be appropriated. The

¹⁸ This impression virtually imposes itself when one reads Ciano's diary for the months May to July 1941; on this and the following cf. Ciano, *Diario*, pp. 508–35. Cf. also H. James Burgwyn, *Mussolini Warlord. Failed Dreams of Empire 1940–1943* (New York, 2012), p. 116; on the following cf. *ibid.*, pp. 116ff.

¹⁹ Ciano, *Diario*, p. 529, entry for 29 June 1941.

Under-Secretary for War Production, General Carlo Favagrossa, anticipated around July 1941 that he could draw on these resources even before the year was out, after the solution to the 'Russian problem'.²⁰ Hitler seems to have been aware of such covetousness, because he had ordered as early as 24 June that the Italians must 'under no circumstances be allowed to come near [the] Crimea', which was to be annexed by the German Reich.²¹

As Hans Woller's new biography of Mussolini concluded: 'Mussolini made the decision to go to war' against the Soviet Union 'quite alone. The cabinet and Grand Council – as had been the case for years – were bypassed, the foreign minister as well as the military leaders saw themselves presented with a *fait accompli*, their advice was sought only for technical matters.' And even if Mussolini had consulted his generals, his ministers or the king: 'Categorical opposition [would] not have been anticipated' from any quarter. 'Almost all were committed to the regime, and most shared Mussolini's thirst for conquest.'²²

The Italian Expeditionary Corps: The Aspiration and the Reality of Fascist Military Policy

Political, ideological or economic considerations were one thing; the question of whether Italy could strategically afford participation in the war against the Soviet Union and whether the Royal Army was ready for it was another. Here one must point out first that Mussolini's adventure on the Eastern Front contributed further to the fragmentation of Italy's own armed forces.²³ This development, which ultimately meant that the Italian military was capable of providing operational main efforts only through great exertions, had already become apparent in 1940 during the attacks on British positions in North Africa, East Africa and Greece, and it became all the more grievous when these remote theatres of war had no adequate economic and military basis for action.

²⁰ Cavallero, *Diario*, p. 211, entry for 21 July 1941; Cavallero pointed out, however, that the Germans would keep the lion's share of the spoils for themselves.

²¹ Franz Halder, *Kriegstagebuch. Tägliche Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres 1939–1942*, vol. 3, edited by Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Stuttgart, 1964), p. 10, entry for 24 June 1941.

²² Hans Woller, *Mussolini. Der erste Faschist. Eine Biografie* (Munich, 2016, p. 226); cf. Goffredo Adinolfi, Political elite and decision-making in Mussolini's Italy, in: António Costa Pinto (ed.), *Ruling Elites and Decision-Making in Fascist-Era Dictatorships* (New York, 2009), pp. 19–54, here p. 36. There is little new information about Italian decision making in the recently published book: Maria Teresa Giusti, *La campagna di Russia 1941–1943* (Bologna, 2016), pp. 83–87, 131–140.

²³ On this cf. the excellent analysis by MacGregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies. Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime, and the War of 1940–1943* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 69–108; on the following see *ibid.*, p. 47.

This basis proved to be so fragile particularly because Italy had not definitively made the transition from an agrarian country to an industrial one, and the associated structural change was in full swing. If one realizes that, in the 1930s, the Kingdom of Italy was in a state of considerably delayed development in comparison with the more advanced industrial nations, it becomes easier to understand why relatively narrow limits were imposed on Fascist military policy. To mention only one indicator: in 1938 Italy produced merely 2.32 million tons of steel – just about 10 per cent of Germany's production and 38 per cent of Japan's. Problems of the corrupt and inefficient regime's own making further exacerbated the already difficult situation. For example, the arms industry, which was controlled by a small number of monopolists such as Fiat and Ansaldo and was otherwise splintered into many small and very tiny firms, and moreover was heavily dependent on imports of raw materials, could at no time produce enough competitive weapons to equip the armed forces properly for the increasingly far-reaching imperialist adventures into which Mussolini drove them, beginning with the war against Abyssinia in 1935.²⁴

At the same time, the societal foundations for a modern army left much to be desired. The Italian system of education produced too few engineers, technicians, indeed even mechanics or drivers to meet the needs of the armed forces, which in addition saw themselves faced with another problem: many soldiers could barely read and write, and as a result they were practically unfit for any tasks other than those of ordinary soldiers.²⁵ In view of these factors, the military culture that survived in Italy was reminiscent in many ways of the nineteenth century and was shaped far more heavily by defeats than by victories. The debacle of Adua in 1896 and the catastrophe of Caporetto in 1917 had left definite marks here and led to a deep-seated sense of inferiority, which not infrequently fostered exaggerated sensitivity and a craving for recognition. The social prestige of officers was influenced by this, along with their self-image and their role behaviour, outwardly and inwardly, which was conspicuously based on forms, ceremonies and privileges. This had a negative effect on dealings with the NCOs and enlisted personnel of their own army, and only in rare instances did the German allies know how to work around it.²⁶

²⁴ Cf. Brian R. Sullivan, 'The Italian Armed Forces 1918–1940', in: Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray (eds.), *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 2, *The Interwar Period* (Boston, 1988), pp. 169–217, and Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane. Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin, 2005), pp. 145–235.

²⁵ On this and on the military culture of Italy see Knox, *Italian Allies*, pp. 23–49.

²⁶ Cf. Jürgen Förster, 'Die Wehrmacht und die Probleme der Koalitionskriegführung' and 'Alessandro Massignani, Die italienischen Streitkräfte und der Krieg der "Achse"' both

The soldiers of the Royal Army felt the harsh consequences of these structural deficits during the first year of the war. In the war against Greece the Italian army lost almost 39,000 men, including both the dead and the missing, and in North Africa British troops battered the 10th Army and took 130,000 prisoners.²⁷ But even so, the military leaders, following the appointment of Ugo Cavallero as Chief of the General Staff in December 1940, were adaptable enough to draw conclusions from the debacle. Admittedly, the scope for sweeping reforms was severely limited, given the political, economic and military parameters, but the measures taken, together with the experience of the Italian soldiers, which had been dearly bought on the battlefield, were nonetheless sufficient to achieve a noticeable improvement in the striking power of the forces that were committed.²⁸ The three divisions that were designated for the Eastern Front benefitted from this development, and they also profited from the fear, widespread among both Fascist politicians and high-ranking military officers, of once again looking like the 'poor relation' in comparison with the German allies.²⁹

Giovanni Messe has aptly described the Italian army corps for the Eastern Front, which as of 10 July 1941 was officially known as the *Corpo di Spedizione Italiano in Russia* (CSIR), as a compromise 'between "aspiration" and "ability"'.³⁰ General Messe thus alluded to the fact that the *Comando Supremo* was indeed aware that the Germans were planning a new blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union, and it consequently sought to equip its own troops appropriately, but with only partial success, given the limited means and the short lead time. Nonetheless, the result of these efforts was definitely impressive. The following were subordinated to the corps headquarters of the *Corpo d'Armata autotrasportabile*, which was supposed to carry the Italian forces to the Eastern Front: the 9th Infantry Division Pasubio, the 52nd Infantry Division Torino, the 3rd Fast (*celere*) Division *Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta*, as well as strong

articles in: Osti Guerrazzi, Lutz Klinkhammer and Thomas Schlemmer (eds.), *'Achse' im Krieg*, pp. 108–121 (especially 117–21) and 122–46 (especially 137–44).

²⁷ Cf. Gerhard Schreiber, 'Deutschland, Italien und Südosteuropa. Von der politischen und militärischen Hegemonie zur militärischen Aggression', and Bernd Stegemann, 'Die italienisch-deutsche Kriegführung im Mittelmeer und in Afrika', both in: Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann and Detlef Vogel, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 3, *Von der 'non belligeranza' Italiens bis zum Kriegseintritt der Vereinigten Staaten* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 275–414 and 591–682, here 413 and 598.

²⁸ Cf. Brian R. Sullivan, 'The Italian Soldier in Combat, June 1940 – September 1943: Myths, Realities and Explanations', in: Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill. The Soldier's Experience of War in the West 1939–1945* (London, 1997), pp. 177–205, here 190–94.

²⁹ Ciano, *Diario*, p. 528, entry for 26 June 1941.

³⁰ Giovanni Messe, *Der Krieg im Osten* (Zürich, 1948), p. 34.

corps troops. The Fascist militia, whose presence was essential in a campaign that was talked up as a crusade against Bolshevism, sent the 63rd Motorized Legion Tagliamento, with three battalions, to the Eastern Front. A small air force made up of fighters, reconnaissance aircraft and transport aircraft was also sent east. All told, the CSIR had more than 62,000 men, 83 aircraft, 220 guns ranging in calibre from 2 cm to 10.5 cm, 92 antitank guns, 4,600 pack animals, mounts or draft animals and 5,500 motor vehicles.³¹

The Pasubio and the Torino were *divisioni autotrasportabili*, which did not exist in the German Wehrmacht. They were born of necessity and combined features of a normal infantry division and a motorized division.³² With around 10,400 officers, NCOs and enlisted personnel, the *divisione di fanteria autotrasportabile* was significantly weaker than the infantry division of the traditional type with around 13,000 men; on the other hand, it had a motorized artillery regiment as well as motorized combat trains. The infantry was indeed trained to be moved with motor vehicles, but its own motor pool was not nearly sufficient for the purpose, so that the division was dependent on the allocation of transport capacity by superior commands. Otherwise the infantrymen of the *divisioni autotrasportabili* had no option but to set out on foot. There were no armoured personnel carriers in the Italian Army. Upon contact with the enemy, the transfer of the infantry regiments in unprotected trucks could thus quickly degenerate into a disaster. The Italian *divisioni celeri*, too, had no counterpart in the Wehrmacht. They were combined-arms forces with a strength of only 7,300 men, consisting of two cavalry regiments, one regiment of *Bersaglieri* (elite light infantry), one light tank battalion and one mounted artillery regiment. Their strength resided less in their striking power than in their mobility.

The 3rd Fast Division *Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta*, with sixty three-ton light tanks L3/33 armed with machine guns, was the only armoured component of the CSIR and undoubtedly constituted part of the elite of the Royal Army. This applied particularly to the Milan-based Regiment Savoia Cavalleria and the specially motorized 3rd Regiment *Bersaglieri*. But the Pasubio and Torino Divisions, too, were made up of seasoned soldiers. All three divisions, whose enlisted personnel came predominantly

³¹ Cf. *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, pp. 531–41, and Lucio Ceva, 'La campagna di Russia nel quadro strategico della guerra fascista', in: *Gli Italiani sul fronte russo*, edited by the Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Cuneo e provincia (Bari, 1982), pp. 163–92, here 173f.

³² Cf. Gerhard Schreiber, 'Die politische und militärische Entwicklung im Mittelmeerraum 1939/40', in: *DRZW* 3, pp. 3–271, here 62, as well as *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, pp. 74ff. and 533–7.

from the Veneto region, Lombardy, Tuscany and Latium, but also from Sardinia and Sicily, had fought in the Balkans and were not only – a rarity for the Italian Army – complete, but had also been reinforced for action in the Soviet Union with antitank guns and mortars. In addition, the corps was equipped for any eventuality with chemical warfare agents (poison gas).³³ Despite these efforts, which aroused Mussolini's enthusiasm,³⁴ the Expeditionary Corps also reflected the structural problems of the Royal Army. Although the *Comando Supremo* had allotted to the CSIR more motor vehicles than was actually justifiable, given the overall situation, the inventory was not sufficient to transport both infantry divisions simultaneously. At the same time, the shortage of high-performance armoured combat vehicles had an effect just as negative as that of the inadequate equipping of the troops with modern artillery and automatic weapons. Contrary to legend, however, the Expeditionary Corps was not a nineteenth-century force that had been rushed into perhaps the most terrible war of the twentieth century, made up of soldiers in poor uniforms with shoes of cardboard and weapons 'from the time of King Pepin the Younger'.³⁵ If anything, the commander of the CSIR and his soldiers were proud of their army corps, which they rightly regarded as a force whose fighting capacity was not to be underestimated.³⁶

Every assessment of the Italian troops that were transferred to the Eastern Front in the summer of 1941 is heavily dependent on the point of comparison selected. Ordinarily the generally better-equipped, better-armed, better-trained and probably also better-led divisions of the Wehrmacht are used for such comparisons, and as a result, even today, one thinks primarily of a motorized and armoured Moloch whenever Hitler's armies come up for discussion, without reflecting upon the fact that this image is based, in particular, on the wartime propaganda of the Third Reich, which gravely distorted the reality. If one compares the Expeditionary Corps with the armoured divisions and motorized infantry divisions of the German army, whose share, however, was only between 10 and 20 per cent, the Corps unquestionably comes off poorly. But if one takes the normal infantry divisions as the standard, things are

³³ Archivio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (henceforth: AUSSME), Rome, L 14/73–8.

³⁴ Cf. Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936–1943* (Tübingen/Stuttgart, 1951), pp. 147f., and Ciano, *Diario*, p. 528, entry for 26 June 1941.

³⁵ Mauro Taccini, 'Con la Cosseria nella battaglia del Don', in: Giulio Bedeschi (ed.), *Fronte russo – c'ero anch'io*, vol. 1 (Milan, 1983), pp. 529–47, here 538.

³⁶ AUSSME, Fondo Messe, busta A, war diary of the Commanding General of the CSIR, entry for 2 September 1941.



Figure 5.1 Hitler, Mussolini and Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, commander of Army Group South, during a visit to German-Soviet front on 28 August 1941.

less clear, especially as this perspective also reveals a number of structural problems with which the German army, like the Royal Italian Army, had to struggle. This becomes just as clear for the problems of equipping troops with motor vehicles as for the arming of the infantry, with both Germans and Italians clinging to standard weapons that had proven their worth in the First World War. In antitank defence, too, parallels become apparent. Both the German and the Italian armies relied on small-calibre, easily movable guns. Both the 3.7-cm antitank gun of the Wehrmacht and the Cannone da 47/32 of the Italian troops were by no means inferior designs, yet they proved largely ineffectual when it came to destroying tanks such as the Soviet T-34.

If one looks at the first year of the war against the Soviet Union – although the Italian divisions were inferior to the divisions of the Wehrmacht in fire power, mobility and telecommunications, the level of training of the NCOs and enlisted personnel left much to be desired, and the officers were accustomed to a different military doctrine – one cannot fail to share the assessment of the German Naval Command, which noted in its war diary on 10 April 1942: ‘deployed in Russ. theatre of war

are 3 [Italian] divisions, which are putting up a commendable fight'.³⁷ The deployment of the Expeditionary Corps, on balance, was successful from the military perspective, and the credit for this belongs in particular to Commanding General Giovanni Messe. And yet the *Comando Supremo* had originally decided against Messe and in favour of Francesco Zingales.³⁸ But after the latter had unexpectedly fallen ill, command of the CSIR was given in July 1941 to the general from southern Italy, who was among the most gifted commanders in the Royal Army and could look back on an impressive career.³⁹

As Commanding General of the CSIR, the charismatic commander knew how to fire his soldiers with fresh enthusiasm, again and again. He proved to be flexible as well as capable of learning, and he also did not shy away from uncomfortable decisions. Imbued with fervent nationalism, his attitude towards the Germans was as ambivalent and full of resentment as that of many Italian contemporaries in the party and the army. On the one hand, he could not get enough praise and recognition from his powerful allies, but on the other hand he reacted in a highly sensitive manner to breaches of etiquette, to criticism and even to attempts at intervention by the Germans. He liked to see himself as an uncompromising representative of the interests of Italy and his soldiers on the Eastern Front; however, the Germans, who held him in such high esteem that they awarded him the Knight's Cross, one of their highest military decorations, regarded him as a 'reliable friend'.⁴⁰

In addition to his personal ambition and concern for his soldiers, Messe was worried, above all, about the national prestige of Italy and the honour of his country's arms. Around the end of 1941, he wanted to restructure the Expeditionary Corps in such a way that it would be able to participate successfully in future offensives. What he had in mind was less a numerical reinforcement of the Italian troops on a large scale than an improvement of their fighting qualities, brought about partly by allocation of heavy artillery, motor vehicles, tanks and antitank weapons. He wanted two fresh divisions – if possible, mountain troops – to replace the battle-weary divisions, which were to be replenished and converted into motorized large formations in order to ensure fighting power and

³⁷ Cited in Schreiber, 'Italiens Teilnahme', p. 261.

³⁸ Cf. Cavallero, *Diario*, p. 202, entry for 21 June 1941, and Messe, *Krieg im Osten*, pp. 31f.

³⁹ Cf. Thomas Schlemmer, 'Giovanni Messe. Ein italienischer General zwischen Koalitions- und Befreiungskrieg', in: Christian Hartmann (ed.), *Von Feldherrn und Gefreiten. Zur biographischen Dimension des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Munich, 2008), pp. 33–44.

⁴⁰ Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (henceforth: BA-MA), Freiburg, MSg 2/4388: Ernst Distler, Als deutscher Verbindungssoffizier bei der italienischen Rußland-Armee 1942/43, unpublished manuscript, p. 16.

mobility in the event of a resumption of mobile warfare. Of these emphatically expressed plans and demands, only a small part could be realized. Matters were left as follows: the 3rd Fast Division was converted into a motorized division in the spring of 1942. Its mounted portions – which had acquitted themselves quite well – were combined to form a cavalry brigade; the corps troops were reinforced with an elite battalion of *Alpini*; and the losses of the two *autotrasportabili* divisions were replaced, as far as possible.⁴¹

Reinforcement for the Eastern Front: Alliance Policy and Economic Desires

The *Comando Supremo* decided on a compromise between the justified demands of the Front and the practical constraints that emerged from the largely politically motivated decision to expand the Italian troop presence in the Soviet theatre of war on a massive scale. The driving force behind this development was Mussolini. The first transport to the Eastern Front had not yet departed when the dictator, on 2 July 1941, held out to the German ambassador, Hans Georg von Mackensen, the prospect of three additional divisions for the war against the Soviet Union.⁴² By then, the General Staff of the Army had been engaged for a number of days in examining the prerequisites for sending a second army corps to the Eastern Front and in the course of these discussions had already mentioned the possibility of combining the two Italian corps under an army high command of their own. On 14 July Mussolini officially instructed General Mario Roatta, the Chief of the General Staff of the Italian Army, to ready an additional army corps for the Eastern Front. Ten days later he informed Hitler of his activities, speaking not only of a second but even of a third corps.⁴³

Six weeks later, during an exchange of ideas on 25 August, he directly urged Hitler to agree to a reinforcement of the Italian forces on the Eastern Front, saying that in this case he could send six, nine and then

⁴¹ AUSSME, Fondo Messe, busta P; Diario Storico (henceforth: DS) II/599, war diary CSIR, November/December 1941 (annexes for December); DS II/576, war diary CSIR, January/February 1942. On the restructuring of the CSIR in the spring of 1942, see *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, p. 170f.

⁴² Cf. *ADAP, Serie D*, vol. 13/1, p. 47 fn. 1. On the Italian initiatives to send additional troops to the Eastern Front, on the strategic calculations of Mussolini and on the German reaction cf. Schreiber, *Italiens Teilnahme*, pp. 262–8.

⁴³ *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, edited by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *Series 9: 1939–1943*, vol. 7, Rome 1987, pp. 390ff. (here 392): Benito Mussolini to Adolf Hitler on 24 July 1941. On Mussolini's reasons for sending additional forces to the Eastern Front, cf. also Burgwyn, *Mussolini Warlord*, pp. 121–4.

even more divisions. But when the Germans more or less nonchalantly put his offers on the back burner, he became increasingly impatient and, in the autumn of 1941, took almost every opportunity to press for a reinforcement of his own troops in the Soviet theatre. In the meantime the military leadership also had repeatedly given consideration to deploying additional divisions. These reflections culminated on 15 November in arrangements to provide for the Eastern Front the following spring, under the leadership of Army High Command 8, two additional corps (II Corps and XVIII Corps) with four infantry divisions (two of them *autotrasportabili*) as well as two mountain divisions and two tank divisions, which were in the process of being activated. Against this backdrop, it is certainly possible that Foreign Minister Ciano also spoke of sending Italian tank divisions on 29 November, when he broached the topic with Hitler once again.⁴⁴

Essentially, it was still the same cluster of motives that had already concerned the Duce when he resolved to deploy the CSIR and that now led him to push repeatedly and urgently for increased participation by Italy in the war against the Soviet Union. In the course of these efforts, he let himself get carried away and made offers that – as he had to know – exceeded the military potential of the Kingdom of Italy. However, he saw the significance of Italy in the alliance of the Axis Powers dwindling with every victory of German arms, especially as his own armed forces could do little to counter the trend: in the Balkans it cost a great deal of effort to overcome the partisans; in the Mediterranean neither the navy nor the air force showed itself to be a match for its British opponents; and in North Africa the German-Italian forces were to suffer, after the successes in the spring of 1941, serious setbacks. In the war against the Soviet Union, however, countries that previously had not even played second fiddle appeared to be gaining in importance. As a result, as early as July 1941 Mussolini emphasized to his Chief of the General Staff Ugo Cavallero that Italy could not exhibit less presence on the Eastern Front than little Slovakia,⁴⁵ and therefore his mood darkened abruptly in October when he learned of the capture of Odessa by Romanian troops.⁴⁶ A transfer of strong Italian forces to the Eastern Front, which since June 1941 had

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 798–802 (here 800): notes by Galeazzo Ciano for Benito Mussolini about his conversations in Berlin; the record of this conversation made by the envoy Paul Otto Schmidt (*Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie D: 1937–1941*, vol. 13/2, 15. September bis 11. Dezember 1941 (Göttingen, 1970), pp. 733ff. differs substantially from Ciano's version).

⁴⁵ Cf. Lucio Ceva, *La condotta italiana della guerra. Cavallero e il Comando supremo 1941/1942* (Milan, 1975), pp. 169f.

⁴⁶ Cf. Ciano, *Diario*, p. 546, entry for 17 October 1941.

replaced the Mediterranean region as the most important theatre of war, was therefore intended primarily to strengthen Italy's position in the concert of aggressor states.

Mussolini proceeded on the basis of the following considerations: first, despite all the Germanophobe diatribes, he continued to regard National Socialist Germany as the only partner with whom his imperialistic aims could be accomplished. Second, he believed that the Wehrmacht would bring the war in the East to a successful conclusion, even though he conjectured that the fighting would drag on for longer than the Germans hoped. Third, he anticipated that Hitler would turn against Great Britain again after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and he assumed that there would be an advance from the Caucasus against the positions of the British Empire in the Middle East. For this reason in particular, there was invariably talk only of an operation by the Italian forces in the southern part of the Soviet Union, and for this reason in particular, there was repeatedly talk, after October 1941, of sending mountain troops to the Eastern Front. Finally, the dictator hoped, by massively reinforcing the Italian troop presence in the Soviet theatre of war, to kill two birds with one stone: to regain lost prestige and secure for Italy the place of *primus inter pares* among the allies of the German Reich and, by means of a pincer attack across the Caucasus and Libya, to link the previously separate theatres of war in the Mediterranean and in the East and thus, at last, to lead to a joint strategy on the part of the Axis Powers. The expansion of the Italian troop presence on the Eastern Front was thus not so much an eccentric 'whim' of Mussolini's⁴⁷ or an outgrowth of the subordination of Italy after the failure of the concept of a 'parallel war' in the autumn of 1940; rather, it arose from the hope, nourished by political and strategic considerations, of transforming the German war into a war of the 'Axis' in which Italy and Germany would divide resources and plunder on far more even terms, reinforcing a common imperialist agenda as well as respecting Italian autonomy and prestige.

One makes it too simple, therefore, if one claims, as Enzo Collotti does, that Italy had neither independent motives nor any particular reasons to wage war against the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ This impression is strengthened if one considers that economic goals played a greater and greater role in arrangements for the deployment of additional Italian divisions on the Eastern Front. Although in the course of the initial organization of the CSIR there was as yet no intense concern with the prospects that

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 544, entry for 10 October 1941.

⁴⁸ Cf. Enzo Collotti, 'L'alleanza italo-tedesca 1941-1943', in: *Italiani sul fronte russo*, pp. 3-61, here 19.

might present themselves to the Italian economy in the Soviet Union, this situation changed once the Expeditionary Corps was on site and realized what resources the conquered territory and the territory yet to be conquered could offer. But because Italy was heading for a serious supply crisis and grain was just as scarce as coal, metals and, in particular, petroleum, it was inevitable that politicians and military leaders began to eye this potential intently.

Since the autumn of 1941, much thought had been given in Rome to projects, some of them far-reaching, which focussed both on the bridging of current bottlenecks and on the long-term exploitation of agricultural and mineral resources. But the Germans dodged relevant questions, whether because they wanted to avoid binding agreements before the end of the war in the East,⁴⁹ because they were suspicious in general of 'economic penetration'⁵⁰ of occupied Soviet territories by their Axis partner, or because they quite simply did not think the Italians were capable of dealing with the problems that a systematic exploitation of the resources in the southern USSR entailed. At the same time, because the Germans were protective of the conquered riches – essentially, the allies had been granted only the materiel of the Red Army that was captured by the forces of the Royal Army⁵¹ – the Italians had no option but to secretly take valuable goods out of the country (for example, in the railway trains that rolled back empty from the Eastern Front to Italy). Not until the summer of 1942, when the transfer of the *Armata Italiana in Russia* (ARMIR) was already well under way, was there any change in the situation. On 9 July, Reich Minister of Economics Walther Funk told Italian Minister of Foreign Trade Raffaello Riccardi that the German side, 'in principle', acknowledged 'that Italy shall act in these territories according to specific guidelines and proposals and shall also receive additional economic forces'. Above all, he said, it must be ensured 'that the Italian trains ... if at all possible' would return from the Soviet Union 'loaded with goods important to Italy'. The details were to be settled in discussions by German and Italian experts.⁵² The fact that the German

⁴⁹ Archivio del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (henceforth: ASMAE), Rome, Direzione Generale Affari Commerciali (henceforth: DGAC), Russia 1943 4/1–2, Appunto per l'Eccellenza il Ministro, dated 17 December 1941.

⁵⁰ ASMAE, DGAC, Russia 1943 4/1–2, telegram 'Russia – interessi economici italiani' to the *Comando Supremo* and various ministries on 18 December 1941.

⁵¹ AUSSME, DS II/628, Pasubio Division war diary, September/October 1941, annex 87: Comando CSIR (No. 3166 di prot. ris. – signed Giovanni Messe) to all subordinated command headquarters and units, dated 5 September 1941.

⁵² *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie E: 1941–1945*, vol. 3, 16. *Juni bis 30. September 1942* (Göttingen, 1974), pp. 171ff. (the quotation is found on p. 173), undated memo regarding a conversation between Reich Minister of Economics Funk

side now was more willing to make concessions than it had been just a few months earlier had a simple explanation, as an official of the Reich Ministry of Economics candidly admitted to Italian discussion partners: the German Reich, by its own efforts, was not able to exploit the resources of the occupied Soviet territories with the necessary speed to provide the war economy of the Axis Powers with vital commodities and raw materials.⁵³

In Rome, great hopes were pinned on the German promises, and specifically in six areas: collection of scrap iron and other discarded metals on a large scale; agriculture; coal and mineral raw materials; petroleum; reconstruction of infrastructure; and rebuilding of industry, with the Italians even suggesting that, after the cessation of hostilities, the motor vehicles of the ARMIR could be left on site in order to have available transport capacity when systematic exploitation of the resources in the conquered territories began.⁵⁴ Some people even entertained the thought of an occupation zone administered by the Italians themselves or – after it had quickly become clear that the Germans would never consent to that⁵⁵ – at least the notion of a sprawling territory as part of the Italian ‘spazio economico’⁵⁶ with long-term rights of use for mines and iron and steel works as well as a network of agricultural production sites, particularly for growing grain. In the *Ministero per gli Scambi e per le Valute*, a project had been worked out that provided for cultivation of grain on 1 million hectares of land in the black-earth regions of the Soviet Union. The Ministry of Agriculture even assumed that it would be possible to farm 6 to 7 million hectares; the 12,000 to 14,000 kolkhozes in this area were to be operated by local workers and led by Italian personnel – around 13,000 to 14,000 specialists.⁵⁷

Like the demand to share commensurately in the spoils, Mussolini’s desire to send additional divisions to the Soviet Union following the CSIR initially found little favour with the Germans. Quite the contrary, the matter was handled in a dilatory fashion, even though Hitler

and Minister of Foreign Trade Riccardi on 9 July 1942; an Italian record of this conversation is found in ASMAE, DGAC, Russia 1943 4/1–2.

⁵³ ASMAE, DGAC, Russia 1943 4/1–2, Appunto per l’Eccellenza Riccardi: Collaborazione economica italo-germanica in Russia, undated.

⁵⁴ ASMAE, DGAC, Russia 1943 4/1–2, memo regarding the discussion with Captain Piccin in the office of Department Head Dr Schlotterer on 22 August 1942.

⁵⁵ ASMAE, DGAC, Russia 1943 4/1–2, Appunto per l’Eccellenza Ciano, dated 9 July 1942, and Appunto per l’Eccellenza il Ministro, dated 7 September 1942.

⁵⁶ ASMAE, DGAC, Russia 1943 4/1–2, Dino Gardini to Renato Marzolo, 19 September 1942.

⁵⁷ ASMAE, DGAC, Russia 1943 4/1–2, Appunto per l’Eccellenza il Ministro Riccardi, dated 7 November 1942.

repeatedly held out, more or less vaguely, to his ally the prospect of a future engagement,⁵⁸ either during the on-going campaign against the Soviet Union or – after the victory – in a campaign against the British positions in the Middle East. The reasons for this reaction are obvious: first, in the summer and autumn of 1941 there was no military need to move new Italian formations to the Eastern Front; second, the structural weaknesses of the Italian armed forces were well known; and third, Hitler was not the only one who believed that the Italians should concentrate on the war in the Mediterranean and in North Africa.⁵⁹ With the failure of Operation Barbarossa and the successful counteroffensive of the Red Army in December 1941, however, there was a radical change in the parameters. The painful setbacks that the Wehrmacht was forced to accept during the Russian winter now seemed to the Duce to offer the longed-for opportunity to regain lost ground and rebalance the relations between the two Axis Powers.

The Raising of the Eighth Army

Around 14 December 1941 General Jodl, the Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command, informed the Italian military attaché by order of Hitler ‘that, besides the one mountain corps recently offered by the Duce, one additional Italian corps will be deployed’.⁶⁰ One week later, General Halder was notified that Hitler intended to induce ‘Italy, Hungary and Romania’ ‘to deliver strong forces for 1942 in time for them to be transported and able to march ahead before the thaw’.⁶¹ Mussolini, who by then had already been informed of the German change of course,⁶² was officially advised by Hitler on 29 December that he was ‘very gratefully’ accepting the Duce’s offer to send two additional corps to the Eastern Front, and he added that this ‘resulted in the possibility’ of

⁵⁸ Cf. e.g. *ADAP, Serie D*, vol. 13/1, pp. 315–18: memo regarding two conversations between Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini on 25 August 1941, or *ADAP, Serie D*, vol. 13/2, pp. 563–70: memo of envoy Paul Otto Schmidt regarding a conversation between Adolf Hitler and Galeazzo Ciano on 25 October 1941.

⁵⁹ Cf. e.g. *DDI, Serie 9*, vol. 7, pp. 494–7: memo regarding a conversation between General Ugo Cavallero and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel on 25 August 1941.

⁶⁰ *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie E: 1941–1945*, vol. 1, 12. Dezember 1941 bis 28. Februar 1942 (Göttingen, 1969), pp. 22f.: memo of Ambassador Ritter, 16 December 1941.

⁶¹ Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, vol. 3, pp. 360f.: telex from the Armed Forces High Command regarding the army’s set of tasks for the near future as expressed by Hitler to General Halder on 20 December 1941.

⁶² Cf. *ADAP, Serie E*, vol. 1, pp. 93f.: telex from General Enno von Rintelen, 22 December 1941.

‘creating a complete Italian army’, to which he ‘would conceivably subordinate the German forces additionally required at that time’.⁶³

Although Mussolini had thus achieved his goal (or perhaps precisely for that reason), he limited himself to a short, but concise reply, remarking ‘that the Italian divisions designated for the Russian front [were] being made ready’; it remained only to ‘solve the question of the transports’ in time.⁶⁴ This assertion, however, did not entirely accord with the facts, for in the course of equipping the formations scheduled for transfer to the Eastern Front, there were far more problems than merely the transport issue. It had been clear ever since the first deliberations in the summer of 1941 that it would be impossible to equip a second or even a third army corps as well as the CSIR without shuffling priorities and playing havoc with previous plans. What weighed most heavily was undoubtedly the shortage of motor vehicles of all types, but modern artillery, antitank guns and anti-aircraft guns also could not be produced just like that. It was obvious to ask the Germans for help, but they showed themselves to be more than aloof and, for example, ruled out the delivery of motor vehicles from their own inventory to ensure the vital mobility of new Italian contingents on the Eastern Front. This refusal was no accident, of course, as the Wehrmacht itself suffered from a painful shortage of vehicles after the Eastern Army had lost around 40,000 trucks between 31 June 1941 and 31 January 1942 alone, of which fewer than 13,000 could be replaced.⁶⁵ In Army Group South, which also included the CSIR, it had already been necessary in July 1941 to fall back on large numbers of Russian *panjewagen*, horse-drawn carts, because half the trucks were damaged and spare parts were not to be had.⁶⁶ It is therefore completely understandable that the Germans closed their minds to the Italians’ desires for a contribution to the modernization of the Royal Army at a time when the forces of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front were being subjected to a radical process of ‘de-modernization’.

In this situation, in early 1942, serious differences arose in Rome between the political and the military leaders, which also highlighted in a defining way the dissimilar notions of how this war was to be waged in general. Mussolini, out of strategic considerations, was prepared not only

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–13 (here 108): Adolf Hitler to Benito Mussolini, 29 December 1941.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 293f.: Benito Mussolini to Adolf Hitler, 23 January 1942.

⁶⁵ For an overview of the development of the equipment level of the German Eastern Army between 22 June 1941 and 31 January 1942, see the table provided by Rolf-Dieter Müller, ‘Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion bis zur Jahreswende 1941/42: Das Scheitern der wirtschaftlichen “Blitzkriegsstrategie”’, in: *DRZW* 4, pp. 936–1029, here 974f.

⁶⁶ Cf. Omer Bartov, *Hitlers Wehrmacht. Soldaten, Fanatismus und die Brutalisierung des Krieges* (Reinbek, 1995), p. 38; the following quotation is found *ibid.*, p. 27.

to reinforce the Italian forces in the Soviet theatre of war on a large scale but also to equip them at the expense of homeland defence, the divisions in the Balkans and even the armed forces in North Africa, in order to achieve his own ambitious goals in the wake of National Socialist Germany. But the conservative generals who were affiliated with the King of Italy eyed an overly close alliance with the Germans with scepticism. They would have preferred to consolidate the positions that had been gained, to distance themselves from their ally – not shying away from confrontation – and thus ultimately to continue pursuing the already failed strategy of ‘parallel wars’. That did not mean that these generals would have flatly rejected an intervention by Italy on the Eastern Front, but on their scale of priorities the Soviet theatre of war ranked distinctly behind the fronts in North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Balkans.⁶⁷

Chief of the General Staff Cavallero, who was an advocate of the ‘Axis’ but also could not easily discount the thoroughly justified objections of his colleagues, tried to be fair to both sides, and he pushed his luck with his German negotiating partners with respect to the distribution of the burdens that must inevitably arise from a massive reinforcement of the Italian contingent. But the German Armed Forces High Command remained firm and did not give their allies a hand with either motor vehicles or antitank and anti-aircraft guns. In addition, the desired increased allocations of raw materials for the Italian economy, to increase domestic production, did not occur.⁶⁸ Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel even informed Cavallero in late January 1942 that Germany was not, after all, able to deliver the 250 promised 4.7-cm antitank guns from captured Belgian inventories. At the same time, however, the Armed Forces High Command expressed its wish in March 1942 that the new Italian divisions, if necessary even at the expense of forces stationed in Croatia or in the homeland, be sent to the Eastern Front as well armed and equipped as possible.⁶⁹ Keitel had reassured General Cavallero only one month before, saying that in the second year of the war against the Soviet Union certain equipment shortages were quite normal and were to be observed in both the German Eastern Army and the Red Army. In view

⁶⁷ Cf. Thomas Schlemmer, *Invasori, non vittime. La campagna italiana di Russia 1941–1943* (Rome, 2009), pp. 32–5; Brian R. Sullivan, The path marked out by history: the German – Italian alliance, 1939–1945, in: Jonathan R. Adelman (ed.), *Hitler and his Allies in World War II* (London, 2007), pp. 116–51, here 134.

⁶⁸ On this and the material below see – unless another source is cited – the documents reproduced in Ceva, *Condotta*, pp. 197–202. On the German position see also Schreiber, ‘Italiens Teilnahme’, p. 268.

⁶⁹ AUSSME, DS II/1469, telegram no. 748/S from Efisio Marras to the Comando Supremo, 7 March 1942.

of Mussolini's decision to undertake a large-scale expansion of the Italian troop presence in the Soviet theatre and the Germans' refusal to provide weapons and materiel for this endeavour, in the end Cavallero had no option but to equip from the Italians' own inventories the divisions designated for the Eastern Front. Although the *Comando Supremo* – indeed, drawing lessons from the employment of the CSIR – did its best, certain bottlenecks remained insurmountable.

The ARMIR, to which, following its transfer to the Eastern Front, the CSIR was also to be subordinated, consisted of the Eighth Italian Army high command, headquartered in Bologna, which started to function on 1 May 1942, the II Army Corps (Alessandria) with the Infantry Divisions Cosseria, Ravenna and Sforzesca, and the Mountain (*Alpini*) Corps (Bolzano) with the three Mountain Divisions Cuneense, Julia and Tridentina. In addition, the Infantry Division Vicenza was directly subordinated to the Army; however, it was designated not for combat missions but rather for protection of the army rear area.⁷⁰ The Fascist militia was represented with two brigades, each consisting of four rifle battalions and two heavy weapons battalions. All told, the Eighth Italian Army had a strength of 229,000 men, who could draw on 224 2 cm automatic cannon, 28 6.5 cm infantry guns, around 600 army, army corps and divisional artillery pieces ranging in calibre from 7.5 cm to 21 cm, and 52 modern antiaircraft guns of the 75/46 type. For antitank defence, the ARMIR had been allocated 297 guns of the 47/32 type (of which 19 were on self-propelled mounts); in addition, there were the 36 powerful 75/32 field guns of the 201st Artillery Regiment and 54 7.5 cm antitank guns of the 97/38 type, which had now been delivered by the Germans, once the vulnerability of the Italian divisions to tank attacks had been noticed.⁷¹ As means of transport, the Army had at its disposal, besides 16,700 motor vehicles of all sorts, 1,130 tractors, 4,470 motorcycles and 25,000 pack animals, draft animals and mounts. With respect to armoured combat vehicles, however, the Italians had, in addition to several armoured scout cars and the aforementioned 19 antitank guns of the 47/32 type on self-propelled mounts, only 31 L6 light tanks, which weighed less than 7 tons and were armed with small-calibre automatic guns. Like the CSIR, the ARMIR too was supported by a small air force consisting of fighters, reconnaissance aircraft and transport aircraft.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, pp. 186–94 and 597–631, as well as Ceva, *Campagna di Russia*, pp. 177ff.; the figures differ somewhat, however.

⁷¹ AUSSME, DS II/1470, war diary Comando Supremo, April 1942, annex 929: telegram no. 1176/S from Efisio Marras to the Comando Supremo, 18 April 1942.

With regard to armament, equipment and motorization, the statements made above about the Expeditionary Corps apply more or less to the Eighth Army also: although the mobility and firepower of the forces, as well as the capability of the signal services, left much to be desired, the ARMIR was not cannon fodder, especially as its divisions for the most part went to the front completely equipped, whilst many divisions of the German Eastern Armies were already visibly battered. At the end of March 1942, only eight of 162 divisions of the Wehrmacht in the Soviet theatre were fully operational and fit for all tasks.⁷² The personnel situation was particularly critical; in total, 740,000 vacancies were recorded for the German Eastern Army as of 2 June 1942, with the shortage of experienced officers and NCOs, as well as trained specialists, having especially serious consequences. However, not only soldiers but also vehicles, weapons and munitions were in short supply, so that even in the armies of Army Group South, which were supposed to bear the brunt of the imminent summer offensive and therefore were given priority with regard to supply, appreciable limitations on their availability for operations and the fighting power of the field elements were expected.

If one looks at the situation reports of German and Italian divisions in the area of command of the Eighth Army, it becomes clear that the Italian divisions did not cut such a poor figure as is generally assumed. As of 20 September 1942, for example, the Division Cosseria, deployed with the II Army Corps, was 764 officers, NCOs and enlisted personnel short of its authorized strength of around 12,250 men. Of 578 motor vehicles and tractors, 554 were available for employment. With regard to antitank guns, artillery pieces, machine guns and draft or pack animals, there were no losses.⁷³ However, in the case of the 62nd German Infantry Division, subordinated to the XXIX Army Corps, on 17 September 1942 there was a shortage of around 3,400 men. Moreover, the division lacked almost 730 draft or pack animals, one-third of its tractors, one-fifth of its heavy antitank guns and one-fourth of its machine guns.⁷⁴ The 298th German Infantry Division of the XXXV Army Corps even reported, as of 1 October 1942, a shortage of more than 4,200 men. The number of motor vehicles was insufficient and the condition of the available ones was just as alarming as that of the horses, for which there was not enough

⁷² On this and on the material that follows, see Bernd Wegner, 'Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1942/43', in: Horst Boog et al., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 6, *Der globale Krieg. Die Ausweitung zum Weltkrieg und der Wechsel der Initiative 1941–1943* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 761–1102, here 778–96.

⁷³ BA-MA, MFB4 18275, fol. 1005, status report Cosseria Division, 20 September 1942.

⁷⁴ BA-MA, MFB4 18275, fol. 1009, status report 62nd Infantry Division, 17 September 1942.

feed.⁷⁵ In the 294th German Infantry Division, which served as a reserve for the Alpini Corps, there was an additional problem: the ‘confused jumble of weapons’ – five different types of machine guns from three countries – as well as the lack of spare parts for the heavy weapons. This state of affairs was ‘not tolerable’ and was affecting ‘training, operational capability and replenishment in quite a significant way’, according to a situation report dated 6 November 1942.⁷⁶

Admittedly, in 1942/43 the ARMIR, owing to the altered circumstances, was considerably worse off in general than the CSIR one year previously, because, for one thing, the Red Army had been strengthened after the catastrophic defeats of the first few months of fighting, and, for another, developments in the field of weaponry and materiel had made advances that had, for the most part, been disregarded by the Royal Army. In addition, the number of soldiers had increased more than the number of heavy infantry weapons and motor vehicles,⁷⁷ so that the Italian troops on the Eastern Front had been reinforced primarily quantitatively, but not qualitatively, as General Messe had required in the winter of 1941/42.

Nevertheless, the *Comando Supremo* had done everything that was half-way reasonable (and perhaps even more) to make the Eighth Army into a field-ready formation. For example, a substantial share of the coveted modern artillery pieces at the disposal of the Royal Army had been allocated to the ARMIR. The relevant staffs themselves had rounded up the more than 12,000 motor vehicles and tractors needed to make the artillery and supply services mobile, even if the combat troops could not be motorized. If one disregards armoured combat vehicles of the newer type, which were reserved for the front in North Africa, the ARMIR undoubtedly received preferential treatment in the spring of 1942, which, given the inadequacy of arms production, was made possible only by deferring the demands of other theatres of war. But how heavily the establishment of the Eighth Army with its 10 divisions and its deployment to the Eastern Front actually burdened Italy, and what magnitude the intervention in the war against the Soviet Union had thus assumed, becomes clear only when one takes into account that the armaments industry of the Kingdom of Italy was able to supply only 20 combat divisions,⁷⁸ and

⁷⁵ BA-MA, MFB4 18275, fol. 1251f., status report 298th Infantry Division, 6 October 1942.

⁷⁶ BA-MA, MFB4 18275, fol. 1228, status report of the 294th Infantry Division (annex), 6 November 1942.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Operazioni delle unità italiane al fronte russo*, pp. 195f. and 631; developments were more favourable for the artillery, where the number of tube artillery pieces had kept pace with the number of soldiers.

⁷⁸ Cf. Knox, *Italian Allies*, p. 48.

that no more than 10 divisions of the Royal Army were deployed in the North African theatre, which was a great deal more important to Italy.

The ARMIR was led not by Giovanni Messe, as one might have expected after his accomplishments as Commanding General of the CSIR, but instead by Italo Gariboldi. In late January 1942, Mussolini had toyed with the idea of transferring command over the new army to Italian Crown Prince Umberto, but this proposal found little favour with the Germans. Officially, practical reasons were used as a pretext, but behind the scenes it was said that Hitler would 'rather do without the entire Italian army than accept the crown prince as the army's commander'.⁷⁹ In the end, the man chosen was Gariboldi, born in 1879, an experienced general staff officer who, as commander-in-chief of the Italian armed forces in North Africa and governor-general of Libya, had already held prominent positions and also had already encountered the German allies. Admittedly, relations between Gariboldi – who was anything but charismatic, had a tendency towards bureaucratic schematism and constantly sought reassurance – and his German counterpart, Erwin Rommel, had quickly taken such an unfavourable turn that Gariboldi was relieved in July 1941 and recalled to Rome. These conflicts, however, seem to have been viewed by each side as no reason to reject the nomination of Gariboldi, whom General Cavallero had praised as a reliable soldier. Both Enno von Rintelen and Wilhelm Keitel signalled their consent,⁸⁰ and on 1 May 1942 Gariboldi assumed command of the Eighth Army. However, the fortunes of war did not greatly favour the commander-in-chief: his divisions were crushed by the Red Army in the winter of 1942/43 on the southern part of the Eastern Front. The remnants of the ARMIR returned in April/May 1943 to Italy, where the Fascist regime was grappling with a profound crisis and the fall of Mussolini was imminent.

⁷⁹ Von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse*, p. 150; cf. also Cavallero, *Diario*, pp. 327f. and 348ff., entries for 27 January, 27 February and 28 February 1942.

⁸⁰ Cavallero, *Diario*, p. 349, entry for 27 February 1942; *DDI, Serie 9*, vol. 8, pp. 543–7 (here 544): memo concerning a discussion between Ugo Cavallero and Wilhelm Keitel on 29 April 1942 at Schloss Klessheim.

6 Croatia

Rory Yeomans

'Yesterday, a large fixed sign "*Victorija*" fell from the city hall onto the head of a police detective Alija Delpašić who was afterwards taken to hospital where he died. Investigations are continuing. A report will follow.' So wrote Ivan Tolj, director of the Ustasha police, from Sarajevo in a telegram to the Ministry of the Interior on 16 December 1941.¹ Earlier that summer, the victory sign had been omnipresent in billboards, placards, on the sides of state buildings and on banners at rallies throughout the Croatian state. Then, it had not been an object of pedestrian hazard but a symbol of the euphoric atmosphere in the aftermath of the founding of an independent Croatian state. That summer, as mass rallies had been held across the state's towns and cities, young men were encouraged to join the Croat volunteer legion which was heading to the Eastern Front to take part in the invasion of the Soviet Union and thus help the construction of a 'new Europe'. The word victory symbolized the struggle for a civilized 'western' Europe was waging against the Bolshevik 'Asiatic' East in defence of European values. According to an editorial in the Banja Luka party newspaper *Hrvatska krajina*, the 'V' was a symbol of an 'awakened Europe'. The time had come when the nations of Europe should embark on a battle against the 'greatest enemy' of Europe and, in its place, build 'a strong, healthy and powerful Europe that will achieve undreamed of development and prosperity, a Europe which with its strength opposes and removes the unnatural Jewish-Bolshevik system of anarchy and bestiality'. In the sign of victory, it concluded, Europe would 'destroy everything that stood in the way of its unity and liberate itself from international Jewry and masonry.'²

What did victory mean in the fascist, Ustasha-led Independent State of Croatia? And how was the idea of victory measured in the context of total

¹ Ivan Tolj to the Ministry of Interior, 16 December 1941, HDA, NDH, MUP, 27.249/456/1.

² 'Slovo "V" symbol pobjeda ujedinjenog evropskog kontinenta', *Hrvatska krajina*, 27 July 1941.

war? On the surface, the stories of the policeman in Sarajevo crushed by a victory sign and the *Hrvatska krajina* editorial represent very different conceptions of the word 'victory'. However, the combination of publicly orchestrated euphoria and unreported tragedy which these stories convey in a time of war also accurately represent the inherent contradictions of the story of the volunteer Croatian Legion and Croatia's entry into the war on the Eastern Front. Founded only three months after the 'national revolution' which had brought the Ustasha movement and its leader Ante Pavelić to power, the Croatian Legion aimed to symbolize the entry of the state into the emerging Nazi empire. Leaving behind the cultural primitiveness of Balkan Yugoslavia as well as the social injustice of the 'Jewish' capitalist era, the Legion would be evidence of the state's commitment to the fight against Bolshevism, an expression of gratitude to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, its 'liberators', and a statement of its aspirations to join the new Europe of modernity and progress. The war on the Eastern Front against Bolshevism was mirrored by a simultaneous war on the home front. This home front war manifested itself in two ways. As well as the battle to rally citizens behind the struggle for the new Europe, the Ustasha state aimed to mobilize popular opinion in support of its other home front – the campaign to rid Croatia of 'undesired elements'. These internal enemies included not just the state's Serbian, Jewish and Roma populations, but those whose ideological outlook or private lives made them 'dangerous' to the new state.³ Moreover, since the party's intellectuals routinely accused Serbs and Jews of being imbued with a 'Bolshevik' and 'eastern' mentality, ideological opponents of the state were increasingly framed in racialized terms too. In its propaganda, the state linked the struggle of new Europe against the Bolshevik East with the war in the homeland against 'eastern' populations. This suggested the border between a progressive Europe and a primitive East was not just an external geographical factor but an internal racial and intellectual concept too, an orient within.

In contrast to the state's public war culture which aimed to generate enthusiasm for the entry of Croat legionaries into the war against the Soviet Union, the financial inducements the state offered to volunteers and their families to encourage recruitment were for some volunteer legionaries, at least, insufficient recompense. Inadequately trained and unprepared, badly equipped and short of both food and supplies, exposed to extreme weather conditions and oblivious to the real military

³ As well as the liquidation and incarceration of leftists and liberals, the state also launched eugenic-inspired campaigns of persecution against homosexuals and prostitutes, outlawed drinking and swearing and made abortion a capital offence.

strength of the enemy, for many, it seems, the first few months were a jolting and dispiriting experience. Life on the front was characterized as much by disillusion, disengagement and, ultimately, defeatism as it was by heroism and ideological zeal. Necessarily, this is only half a story. There were other volunteers who remained ideologically committed to the struggle against the Bolshevik East and the building of the new Europe, optimistic about the prospects of success and willing to endure privation for the nation. A geographical distance separated volunteers on the frontline from citizens who were being bombarded on the home front with radio and newsreel presentations, exhibitions, propaganda pamphlets and daily news reports eulogizing the Legion's role, but this public culture also suggested a chasm in how they experienced the war too. Nonetheless, the reproduction of discourses related to the struggle against the 'Asiatic' threat in the campaign of extermination being waged on the home front against the East within, guaranteed that the Legion remained present in everyday life and the nation ever present in it.

The Origins of the Croatian Legion

When Ante Pavelić, the Ustasha leader and Poglavnik of the new state, gave his address on 2 July 1941 calling on young men aged between twenty and thirty-two to volunteer for the Legion, he presented it as a policy driven by pressure from below. He had received requests, he claimed, 'on a daily basis' from citizens of 'all social classes' for the formation of a volunteer legion to fight on the Eastern Front. On the other hand, he stressed that as much as the armies of the Duce and the Führer had gone into battle for the 'liberation' of Croatia, so 'today, when the final confrontation with the greatest enemy of the new order and the freedom of the Croat people' was being pursued, it was the 'sacred duty' of every Croat to contribute his part. This suggested that the policy was being imposed from above too.⁴ Which was nearer to the truth? According to the military historian Dragan Kljajić, writing in 1989, the formation of the volunteer legion represented a 'blood tribute' by the Croatian state to Nazi Germany for establishing the Ustasha state.⁵ Bogdan Krizman, by contrast, argued that the driving force behind the creation of the Legion was the Ustasha leadership, motivated by a

⁴ 'Poglavnikov proglas hrvatskom narodu – Dobrovoljna vojna služba protiv boljševika', *Hrvatski narod*, 3 July 1941. 'Poglavnik' is usually translated as 'chief' or 'leader' and in the context of the Independent State of Croatia had a meaning equivalent to the Italian Duce or the German Führer.

⁵ Dragan Kljajić, *Ustaska legija pod Stalingradom* (Belgrade: Mladost, 1989).

number of factors including national prestige and an overly optimistic reading of the chances of German success. On 24 June 1941, two days after Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Siegfried Kasche sent a telegram to Joachim von Ribbentrop mentioning a letter Mladen Lorković, the Croatian foreign minister, wanted to forward to the Führer from the Poglavnik. Among other things the letter mentioned the desire of Slavko Kvaternik, the supreme head of the Croatian armed forces, to establish a volunteer unit which could be used in operations in the East, in this way strengthening the 'ancient' Croat-German military brotherhood. The letter added, though, that some soldiers had already asked Kvaternik for permission to fight shoulder-to-shoulder with their German comrades. In such a way, Croatia would make its sacrifice for the new Europe. Meanwhile, in a letter to the Croatian ambassador in Germany, Stjepan Perić, Lorković confessed that 'the German-Russian war is extremely satisfactory for us because, on the one hand, the feeding of the population of Europe has been completely resolved and, on the other, in the Balkan neighbourhood Serbophile Russia will be replaced by Ukraine'. Likewise, in his letter to the Führer, the Poglavnik had written with a similarly optimistic prognosis, predicting that by the time the volunteers had set off, the war would probably already be over.⁶

Ivan Babić, a young ambitious officer in the Ministry of the Croatian Army (*Ministarstvo hrvatskog domobranstva* – MHD), had a different take. He believed that the formation of the Legion was motivated by the desire to reduce Italian power by winning favours for Croatia from Germany as much as by the belief that Germany would win the war. This view was not shared by army officers, many of whom opposed sending young soldiers to fight far away since they believed their main task was the suppression of internal enemies. Nonetheless, after the general call up for the Legion was announced, Babić recalled, there had been an enthusiastic response, especially among officer cadets of the Domobran academy. A number of them had been newly promoted to the rank of captain only the month before and interrupted their education to join the Legion. Babić would later write that all the volunteers joined out of 'pure patriotism'. At a time when the entire Croatian population was 'euphoric' because of the establishment of the Croatian state and the collapse of Yugoslavia, they were prepared to fight for their nation, believing that the struggle against Bolshevism was also 'a struggle for freedom'. Furthermore, Babić wrote, there was great enthusiasm for Nazi Germany based both on historical ties and excitement about National

⁶ Bogdan Krizman, *Pavelić između Hitlera i Mussolinija* (Zagreb: Globus, 1980), pp. 69–70.

Socialism and both army officers and intellectuals applied. While disillusionment with the reality of the Croatian state increased over time, this was overcome by 'idealistic patriotism and the desire to fight for the Croatian state as well as a strongly expressed military spirit'.⁷ The fact that in the first two weeks of recruitment the Legion was able to attract over 5,000 volunteers seems to bear out Babić's claim. On the other hand, financial considerations were clearly a factor too. Volunteers for the Eastern Front were entitled to four kinds of pay: a military salary; a war supplement paid only on the days the soldier was in the combat zone; an additional military supplement paid to his family; as well as a supplement paid to the soldier's family if he was the breadwinner and was not in state service to ensure they could afford staple goods.⁸

The 369th Croatian Reinforced Infantry Regiment or Croatian Legion was made up of three main battalions: a mobile battalion; a detonation and trench-digging battalion; and an infantry battalion. At the same time, a separate Croatian Airforce Legion (*Hrvatska zrakoplovna legija*), commanded by Ivan Mark and a Croatian Naval Legion (*Hrvatska pomorska legija*) commanded by Andro Vrkljan, were also being formed within the Luftwaffe and German navy respectively.⁹ Recruitment offices were set up in the state's three largest central cities – Zagreb, Sarajevo and Varaždin. The establishment of the Croatian Legion was publicly announced in the Poglavnik's address of 2 July, published on the front page of all newspapers the following day, in which he called on young male volunteers between the ages of twenty and thirty-two to take part in 'the struggle against Jewish-Bolshevik Moscow'. In his address, he conjured up a continent at peril from Bolshevik invasion. He explained that 'our great allied German nation' was defending Europe from 'Jewish-Bolshevik bestiality' which wanted to 'enslave' all nations, placing them under its 'destructive and violent' rule. Drawing an allusion between the war being fought in the East and the internal war Croatia was fighting within its own borders against enemy populations, the Poglavnik declared:

⁷ Amir Obhodas and Jason Mark, *Hrvatska legija: 369 pojačana (hrvatska) pješačka pukovnija na istočnom bojištu, 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2012), pp. 15, 18, 213.

⁸ For the full details of the legal statute see 'Zakonska odredba o podpori obiteljima vojnika, pripravnika Hrvatske legije', *Narodne novine*, 4 August 1941.

⁹ On the Croatian Airforce Legion see e.g. Tihomir Lisko and Danko Čanak, *Hrvatsko ratno zrakoplovstvo u Drugome Svjetskom Ratu* (Nova Gradiška: MTT, 1998) and Frank Joseph, *The Axis Airforces: Flying in Support of the German Luftwaffe* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, 2011); on the Croatian Naval Legion see Andro Vrkljan, *Hrvatski argonauti 20. stoljeća: povijest Hrvatske pomorske legije na Crnom moru, 1941–1944* (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2012). The official name for the Croatian Maritime Legion was the Croatian Naval Section (*Hrvatski pomorski odjel*), emphasizing its subordinate nature.

They want to starve Europe and in a cowardly way to ambush nations and enslave them under their tyrannical rule. In particular, the Moscow-Jewish-Bolsheviks were sent to penetrate into the lands of South-Eastern Europe and the Balkan Peninsula. It is well known that the Moscow Bolsheviks were always the enemies of the Croat people, that they always supported the Belgrade rulers, they always had in mind to get the Croat people under their control, to take away the land of the peasant, and blight and destroy Croatian cultural and spiritual heritage.

As a result, the Croats could not 'watch on calmly in this great and fateful moment'. Rather, they 'burn with the desire to take part in this struggle for the destruction of the greatest enemy of humanity and the Croat spirit', all the more because 'the Moscow rulers on the eve of our liberation were in an alliance with the Belgrade rulers and thus until the last moment obstructed our national liberation and saved the prison of the Croat people – the former Yugoslavia'. He called on Ustashas 'and other Croatian patriots' who had received military training and who wanted to take part in 'a sacred struggle against the perfidious Bolshevik parasite for the freedom of oppressed peoples' to register immediately at the nearest army recruitment centre. He also confirmed that the families of those who volunteered would receive a regular war assistance payment. At the same time, he emphasized that it was an honour for every Croat soldier to fight 'with a gun in his hand, shoulder-to-shoulder with his old war comrades from the undefeated German army with whom he has been eternally connected in war comradeship, to renew this historical brotherhood in arms and eternally intensify the fame, honour and prosperity of the Croat people of the Independent State of Croatia'.¹⁰

In anticipation of the Poglavnik's announcement, preparations had already been made for the recruitment of volunteers into the Legion. On the same day, Stanislav Stanzer, the commander of infantry forces, sent an order to the MHD and all military regional headquarters, units and divisions with instructions for the building of the regiment. He ordered commanders of regional headquarters to immediately undertake all measures necessary to ensure the circulation of the Poglavnik's announcement 'on the widest basis through placards and oral announcements (according to the traditions of the particular region) as soon as possible so that the announcement penetrates even the most remote regions'. Stanzer instructed recruiting officers to pay particular attention to whether volunteers had served previously in the military and what rank they had attained since those who had not fully completed their military training could not be accepted. Recording the national and

¹⁰ 'Poglavnikov proglas hrvatskom narodu – Dobrovoljna vojna služba protiv boljševika', *Hrvatski narod*, 3 July 1941.

political past of the applicant was equally important, he added, because joining the Legion was only open to those 'who are racially pure Croats, Ukrainians and Russians who have no kind of deceptions in their past or vices in their character'. All volunteers were required to undertake a medical examination and those who were judged unfit were to be rejected. Meanwhile, all officers, junior officers and soldiers were to be supplied with new clothes and coats as well as two pairs of underwear, a new pair of shoes and a haversack containing cleaning, washing and eating implements. Stanzer stressed the ambassadorial role the legionaries would play. As the Legion would represent 'our young state', it was the special duty of all officers to ensure that they permitted into the Legion only the best and 'most mature' element. Hence, all those who by their 'physical capabilities, character, political and social inclinations' were not suitable 'should not be permitted into the ranks of this honourable mission'.¹¹

Despite the inherited national and racial characteristics which were meant to epitomize the fighting spirit of the Legion, it was firmly under the control of the German army. According to a circular sent from Kvaternik to the Military Office of the Headquarters of the Croatian Land Army in late July 1941, members of the Legion, while they would carry the name of the 369th Croatian Infantry Regiment, were to be placed under the command of the German high command, subject to the same disciplinary procedures as other members of the German armed forces. Volunteers would also wear 'the symbols of German sovereignty and corresponding German symbol of rank', but as a sign of their 'membership of the homeland' would wear on the right arm of their soldier's coat and jacket as well as on the right-hand side of their helmet a 'national symbol'. This symbol took the form of the traditional Croatian red and white checkerboard flag, the *Šahovnica*.¹² Moreover, ethnic Ukrainians and Russian émigrés in Croatia were also encouraged to join the Legion. This was not only because they were considered to be closely related racially to the Croats but also, as the daily Zagreb newspaper *Novi list* pointed out, were united by a common Bolshevik enemy. Indeed, it drew an explicit parallel between the respective liberation struggles of the Ukrainians and Croats: 'There have rarely been two peoples that have had such close historical experiences as the Croat and Ukrainian peoples', it wrote. 'Two peoples have set off on the same Golgotha journey which for the Croats ended with resurrection and for the Ukrainians will also end in liberation soon too.' While cities in Galicia were being turned

¹¹ Stanislav Stanzer, 'Naredba broj 8', 2 July 1941, HDA, NDH, D-2389/V.2261.

¹² Order from Kvaternik to the Military Office of the Headquarters of the Infantry Army of the Independent State of Croatia, 28 July 1941, HDA, NDH, D-2389/V.2261.

to rubble by German bombers, their Bolshevik oppressors were being crushed. Hence, Ukrainians interpreted the bombs as their 'sacred liberation guardian angels'. In an open letter to *Novi list*, a leader of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists in Croatia wrote that only through blood could he and his fellow Ukrainians achieve their eternal dream. 'When one reads the history of Ukraine and I note that I am really her son, after reading your appeal how can I remain indifferent? Despite all attempts to pacify myself, I cannot remain calm. Desire is pulling me and it is imperative for me to obey this command and offer my homeland all my intellectual and physical strength.'¹³ In fact, according to *Novi list*, on their own initiative, Russians and Ukrainians living in Zagreb had organized their own legion in the war against Bolshevism which had 'enslaved' their homeland and which they had left twenty-four years earlier, 'wandering through life in hardship'.¹⁴

Although it is not clear how many ethnic Russians and Ukrainians volunteered for the Legion, some certainly were keen. One of these was Nikola Lebenda, a colonel from Varaždin and a Ukrainian émigré. In a petition to Field Marshall Kvaternik on 28 June 1941, even before the formation of the Legion had been announced, he wrote:

Commander! I am requesting to be included in the first army units which go to the Eastern Front against the Bolsheviks. In the case that our Domobrans, for now, will not go to the front against the Bolsheviks, I am asking you to permit the formation of a Croatian volunteer unit for the battle with the Red Army so that I can incorporate Ukrainians living in Croatia into this unit. In my twenty-five years of officer service this is the first time that I have fought with irregulars. But the intensity of my desires and your esteemed name embolden me. I was born in Poltava in Ukraine, but have my home town in Sarajevo and am married to a Croat woman.¹⁵

By the time the ministry replied, Lebenda had already been appointed as a colonel and recruiter for a Croatian Legion in Varaždin. *Novi list* referred to the lines of young men who queued up to join the unit, including many disappointed teenagers who lacked the necessary military experience to become, as it put it, 'crusaders for the new millennium'.¹⁶

¹³ 'Ukrajinska legija dobrovoljaca svakim danom je sve veća-u Hrvatskoj živi oko 25,000 Ukrajinaca', *Novi list*, 14 July 1941.

¹⁴ 'Za rat protiv razornog komunizma', *Novi list*, 9 July 1941.

¹⁵ Nikola Lebenda to Kvaternik and MHD, 28 June 1941, HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, 1450, D-2229/881/41.

¹⁶ Internal communication from MHD, 21 July 1941, HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, D-2229/8380/41; 'Iz Zagreba i pokrajine stižu tisuće dobrovoljaca u sabiralište da podju oduševljeni u borbu protiv boljševizma', *Novi list*, 9 July 1941.

The newspaper reported that First World War veterans were volunteering for service too, despite being too old. In a despatch of 13 July 1941, it noted that men who have already 'experienced the horror of war are once again eager for battles' because they were convinced that in fighting the Bolsheviks they were risking their lives for the good of the whole of humanity. In this sense, *Novi list* argued, these men were drawing on the best national traditions of blood and sacrifice and putting into practice the lessons of their own liberation struggle for the good of the new Europe. In joining the Legion, they aimed to re-enact the spirit of sacrifice, vengeance and euphoria they had experienced during Croatia's national and social revolution of 1941. On the Eastern Front, they would liberate other oppressed nations from Bolshevism just as they had their own from Jewry and Serbian domination. 'For the Croats', the newspaper declared, 'struggle is a requirement for living. In the creation of their own state, the Croats have shown that it is precisely through struggle and blood that one achieves freedom. Now, in answering in large numbers the Poglavnik's wish they are convinced that the sacrifices they make will not be in vain, that only in this way will they be able to get revenge and satisfaction for all the Jewish and communist propaganda which worked so destructively and negatively in Croat ranks in the most critical moments and that Jewry which caused the greatest evil to the Croat people, in fact more than any other enemy of the Croat people that has ever existed, will be punished.'¹⁷

Mobilizing Public Euphoria and the Departure of the Legion

Throughout the summer, Ustasha officials and military personnel gave speeches and held rallies across the state in support of the Legion recruitment drive. In their speeches, officials reinforced the idea that volunteering for the Legion was the duty of all those who were eligible and wanted to show gratitude towards the Third Reich for the liberation of Croatia. Equally as important, their speeches routinely evoked memories of the misery of life under Serbian 'tyranny', sought to remind the masses of the struggle Ustasha militias were waging against the state's Serbian inhabitants and 'Chetnik-Bolshevik' insurgents and appealed to the desire for social advancement and justice. In this way, the campaign of genocide targeted at 'undesired elements' was linked to the war being waged against 'primitive' and 'Asiatic' Bolsheviks in the East. A speech

¹⁷ 'Javlaju se i veteran u dobrovoljačke legije protiv boljševika', *Novi list*, 14 July 1941.

Ademaga Mešić, a deputy to the Poglavnik, gave at a rally in Banja Luka on 7 July 1941 illustrates this dynamic well. In his speech, Mešić emphasized the importance of the victory of the Ustasha movement's liberation struggle, stressing that had it not been for Adolf Hitler the Serbs would have continued to 'terrorize' the Croats. In this case, the Catholics and Muslims would have 'disappeared' from the region. 'The Serbs aspired to, and went as far as to, impose their Serbianness on us but they did not succeed', Mešić remembered. 'Their time in this region has once and for all run out. In a free homeland we will today be able to develop culturally, economically and in all directions.' Mešić called on those men present at the rally to demonstrate their solidarity with the 'heroic German people' by joining the Legion. He recalled, too, how in 1914 he had organized volunteers for the war against the Serbs and how he took part again in 1941 by order of the Poglavnik. At the same time, Mešić also sought to appeal to the widespread desire for land reform and social justice among Muslims, promising to resolve the agrarian problem, especially the issue of land redistribution, which was an important demand of Muslim leaders. Mešić set out the benefits volunteers would have after the war when they returned to their homeland in victory as well as the benefits their families would receive while they were away fighting. In his despatch, the correspondent for *Hrvatska krajina* described a war rally saturated with nationalist euphoria. 'In the hall', he reported, 'we heard the chant "We all want to go to the battlefield irrespective of our ages."' The correspondent added that:

one old Muslim volunteer with a cockade around his fez claimed to speak seven languages. He said that in the last war he had been in Russia and had got to know it well. Now, he wanted to set off into battle against the Bolsheviks. Then a long row of youths registered and they all announced that they would like as soon as possible to step into battle.¹⁸

Hrvatska krajina claimed that the recruitment drive had been highly successful, writing on 16 September 1941 that the 'consciousness' of every Croat had been 'enflamed' while 'aroused' Croat youth, 'honoured with the greatest trust', had set off joyfully 'under Croatian banners and with songs, leaving their homes and families'. Even elderly *hodžas* [Muslim schoolmasters] yearned to be 'warriors against Bolshevism'.¹⁹

Whatever else, the newspaper's description of the recruitment rallies was probably accurate. Certainly, there was no shortage of volunteers. In

¹⁸ 'Broj prijavljenih dobrovoljaca stalno raste', *Hrvatska krajina*, 9 July 1941.

¹⁹ 'Hrvatska krajina odaziva se odušljeveno poglavnikom pozivu', *Hrvatska krajina*, 16 September 1941.

the first two weeks alone, around 5,000 men volunteered for service in the Legion. The reasons for joining were diverse. Some clearly did so out of a sense of patriotism, others for ideological and religious reasons (for example, because they feared the threat of communism to national identity or the Catholic Church or because they saw Croatia as an historical bulwark of western Christianity or *antemurale christianitatis* against the Bolshevik East) and others still were attracted by the relatively generous financial rewards they and their families would receive. Paradoxically, for a small number of individuals – the devoutly Catholic legionary poet Pero Kojaković being the most well-known example – volunteering for the Legion provided a way for Ustasha activists disillusioned with the violent and chaotic reality of the new state to remove themselves from the struggle on the home front while continuing to serve the nation on the Eastern Front.²⁰

Out of the initial cohort of volunteers, nearly 4,000 were selected and placed under the command of Ivan Markulj, who had been appointed the Legion's commander. The first unit was formed in Sarajevo, with others following in Varaždin and Zagreb; later, in December 1941, a reserve division was established. Although officially it was part of the regular Croatian army (the Domobrans) and recruits wore Croatian national insignias on their arms and helmets, essentially the Legion constituted a unit of foreign volunteers within the Wehrmacht. As part of the 100th Light Infantry Division it was subject to the orders of the German high command.²¹ Following their recruitment, Legion volunteers underwent training in Dollersheim under the direction of Wehrmacht officers. This lasted about three weeks, ending on 15 August. The first units were transported by train to Dangen in Bessarabia, Romania, near the Soviet border, the next day with the last units leaving Germany on 19 August. There they assembled on 23 August to travel to Poltava by foot, a journey which took thirty-five days and encompassed 800 km. One luckless legionary, Captain Ivica Vujić, died on the way, falling from a motorcade.²² After weeks of trudging on muddy paths and roads, the Legion reached the village of Budinskaja on 9 October where they had their first engagement with the Soviet army. A few days later, the Legion entered the village of Nadeždovka as part of the 100th Light Infantry Division of the 17th German army from where it lined up on the Dnieper River.²³

²⁰ See Augustin Franić, 'Uspomena na hrvatskog legionara Pera Kojakovića', *Politički zatvorenik* 7, nos. 64–5 (August 1997), pp. 53–4.

²¹ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers* (London: IB Tauris, 2012), p. 98.

²² Obhodas and Mark, *Hrvatska legija*, pp. 20–4.

²³ Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front*, pp. 97–8.

After participating in battles in Valka and Kharkov, on 22 November it then took part in a major confrontation led by the Wehrmacht across the Mius River just as the climate began to plunge to sub-zero temperatures. This sudden change in the weather had a significant impact on the Legion which was ill-equipped with winter clothing.²⁴

While the infantry only began travelling to Dollersheim in the middle of July, the volunteer naval and air force units began moving out to the East as early as 8 July, one week after the Poglavnik had given his address. In his public farewell to the Legion's air force pilots, the Poglavnik, accompanied by Field Marshall Kvaternik, told the volunteers in a public ceremony at the Maksimir football stadium:

I am sure and the entire Croatian nation is sure that you will ... take with you the eternal traditional glory of the Croatian nation and past Croatian generations and in this period fill new pages of Croatian heroism, Croatian military duty... beating the foundations of the soldierly, knightly and heroic character of the Croatian nation in the new Europe, in the new order and the new era. Carry in your thoughts and your hearts the resurrected Independent State of Croatia. Carry a picture of the Croat people who have only recently been liberated. Think about your homeland and heroically, and like lions, rule the skies above the enemy's land.²⁵

Meanwhile, on 21 July Bosnian volunteers left from Zagreb. *Novi list* maintained that the enthusiasm with which Bosnian Muslims in Sarajevo had answered the call to join the Legion demonstrated the blood brotherhood of Croats and Muslims. In answering the call to join the 'struggle against the greatest enemy of all the efforts of the human race for culture and peace, yidmarxism', Bosnian Muslims and Catholics had once again demonstrated that 'in them there flows the purest Croatian blood' while 'the strong muscles and iron characteristics' of these men gave notice that they would endeavour to shine a light on the face of the Croatian nation as not only a militaristic society, but a 'cultured' one too.²⁶

As well as official farewells from Ustasha officials, the departure of volunteers was frequently characterized by a festive mood as people said goodbye to loved ones, friends and acquaintances setting off to the East. The newspaper *Hrvatski narod* provided an evocative picture of one such departure, describing how on the way to the station from the artillery barracks in Ilica, volunteers from Varaždin were accompanied by crowds

²⁴ Obhodas and Mark, *Hrvatska legija*, p. 71; Muller, *The Unknown Eastern Front*, p. 99.

²⁵ 'Hrvatski zrakoplovci polaze dobrovoljno u borbu protiv Boljševima', *Novi list*, 8 July 1941.

²⁶ 'Poglavnik je srdačno pozdravio dobrovoljce iz Herceg-Bosne pred njihova polazak na sovjetsku frontu', *Novi list*, 22 July 1941.

of citizens as well as their families who had travelled to Zagreb. While the train waited, Croatian and Ustasha marching tunes were played on the platform by a brass band and inside the carriages by a legionary band. The carriages in which the Croat legionaries were travelling were decorated with greenery and flowers, it reported, while in the carriages it noted that:

our proud natives of Varaždin have covered their instruments with the words of *Lijepa naša* and the Croatian coat of arms, the Croatian tricolour and the inscription: 'The Croatian Legion – for the homeland prepared!' As the train moved out of the station, from the throats of all Croat soldiers a unanimous slogan reverberated: Long live the Poglavnik Dr Ante Pavelić, long live the Independent State of Croatia.

Soldiers leaned out of the train windows and called out to relatives and well-wishers to protect their white city for them and for a long time afterwards slogans for the Poglavnik Dr Ante Pavelić and the Independent State of Croatia echoed around the walls of the station until the last carriage had disappeared from view.²⁷

Early despatches from the Eastern Front about the progress of the Legion reflected this sense of war euphoria, abounding in details about the number of Soviet planes the Croatian air force had shot down, the Bolshevik attacks repulsed by Croat soldiers, the Russian units destroyed, iron crosses awarded and sea battles won. According to one newspaper headline, Croat soldiers had conducted themselves 'brilliantly' in the theatre of operations in the East while another stated with pride that 'where the Croats have cleansed the woods there remains not one solitary Bolshevik anymore'.²⁸ The atmosphere of triumphalist invincibility the media was attempting to generate was vividly captured in an editorial

²⁷ 'Poglavnik se oprašta od bosanskih dobrovoljaca Hrvatske legije', *Hrvatski narod*, 22 July 1941. The phrase 'For the homeland prepared!' ('Za dom spremni!') was the official greeting in the Ustasha state used at the end of letters, reports and newspaper articles as well as in speeches and at rallies. By law citizens were also supposed to use this phrase, whether in private correspondence or greeting one another. The Ministry of the Interior, local Ustasha communes, leaders and camps issued intricate and detailed instructions on how it should be used and the Ustasha Police went to great lengths to ensure it was used, even bugging private citizens' phones and levying fines. However, despite claims by party theoreticians about its supposed medieval origins and sanctions for those not using it, many citizens continued to use the previous 'bourgeois' greetings associated with interwar Yugoslavia. For a longer discussion on this see Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), pp. 235–56.

²⁸ See, for example, 'Gdje Hrvati počiste šumu tu može ostaje ni jedan Boljševik', *Nova Hrvatska*, 9 November 1941; 'Hrvatski su se zrakoplovci sjajno istakli na istočnim bojištu', *Nova Hrvatska*, 13 November 1941; 'Hrvatsko čete zauzela Valki, važno uporište neposredno pred Harkovom', *Novi list*, 23 October 1941.

on 18 July 1941 in *Hrvatska krajina* which proclaimed the war against the Bolshevik East all but over:

The German victory has provoked a wave of enthusiasm in the countries of the Triple Pact, above all because regular units or volunteers from all fraternal states today fight shoulder-to-shoulder with the heroic German army and because all the nations of Europe know that the struggle against the Bolsheviks is not only a struggle of the German people but the entire cultured Europe against barbarians whose first aim is the destruction of everything that humanity built and constructed through the centuries ... Among the entire range of European states, the Croat people at the front with its Poglavnik was among the first to provide evidence of its support and solidarity with the great German people and their wise leader Adolf Hitler ... Under the blows of the united forces of the Axis army the Bolshevik forces are crumbling, their divisions are disappearing and the champions of the new order and defenders of European culture are getting ever closer to the main centres of the Soviet Union.²⁹

Many such newspaper reports underlined that this optimism was not propaganda; rather, it simply reflected the letters soldiers were sending back from the front. For *Nova Hrvatska*, for example, reporting on 20 December 1941, the letters of heroic soldiers were 'living documents' which showed that 'the awakened strength' of the European people 'has struck important blows against the bestial Bolshevik hordes'.³⁰

The Struggle of United Europe in the East Comes to Zagreb

More than anything the entry of a Croatian legion into the war in the East could be summed up in one word: Europe. From the formation of the Legion in July 1941 its creation was interpreted not merely as a symbol of Croatia's liberation from Serbian oppression and Balkan primitiveness, but a journey towards European enlightenment. Far from Croatia's Europeaness being a new phenomenon, Ustasha intellectuals and officials argued that it was simply a continuation of Croatia's historical mission in defence of European values and culture. At a rally of Ustasha workers in Križevci in October 1941, for instance, the minister for public works Ivo Bulić stated that Croatia had already made great sacrifices in the past for European culture, 'expending itself in the battle against barbarism from Asia'. As in the past, the Croat soldier had protected European culture, in the same way, today, the Croatian nation again had

²⁹ 'Silan odjek Njemačkih pobjeda u borbi protiv boljševima', *Hrvatska Krajina*, 18 July 1941.

³⁰ 'Hrvatski prvoborci na istočnom bojištu', *Nova Hrvatska*, 20 December 1941.

the good fortune to be called into battle for the 'salvation and protection' of Europe, listening to 'the natural laws of race' and its own 'awakened' blood.³¹ Croatian newspapers also printed with pride confirmation of the nation's European heritage from German journalists, since to them it seemed to be recognition of Croatia's status in the new Europe.³² As much as the sacrifices of Croat soldiers on the Eastern Front, the campaign of terror against Serbs, Jews and other undesired elements was frequently cited as evidence of Croatia's European values. Looking back on the first six months of the state in October 1941, the journalist Frano Sulić observed that Croatia had not merely proved it was worthy to be considered a respected member of the new Europe by virtue of the fact that its soldiers, air force pilots and sailors had set off proudly onto the far eastern battlefield, or because throughout history the Croat soldier had been famous for shedding his blood on Europe's battlefields. Rather, as in the past when the Croat soldier had stopped the advance of 'wild waves of Tartars and Ottomans', on the Drina, the mythical border of the East and the West, the Croat soldier was 'protecting the inheritance of the history of Europe, the new Europe, the new movement'. As well as fighting on the borders of the Asiatic East to defend Europe, Croat warriors were also fighting the other East within.³³ Another commentator, the party ideologue and historian Mijo Bzik, meanwhile, explicitly linked the war against the eastern Bolsheviks in defence of new Europe to the campaign of genocide against the 'eastern' Serbian, Jewish and Roma populations. He compared the latter struggle to the defensive struggle Croats had waged against the invading 'Asiatic' Ottoman army and which the statesman Marko Marulić had described in a letter to the Pope.

Today, after more than four centuries, the Croats are once again entering a battle against the eastern hordes that are allied with all those who support the goal of destroying Europe. Just as Serbs and Vlachs came as jackals behind Turkish units, burning down Croat homes, today they shadow us on our journey with the same perfidious hatred. But Croat heroes today represent the real face of Croatia. They are saving the authentic face of Europe.³⁴

Likewise, Mladen Lorković speaking in Berlin in December 1941 drew a parallel between the wars the state was pursuing on the Eastern Front and the home front, stressing their shared racial and sacral nature. From the outset, he insisted, the war on the Eastern Front had been a 'sacred war' and a 'just and noble struggle' of 'oppressed' large and small

³¹ 'Hrvati se već jednom spasili kultura Europe od najedzi s Istoki', *Novi list*, 7 October 1941.

³² Hildegard Springer, 'Hrvatska – najmlada država Nove Europe', *Novi list*, 7 October 1941.

³³ Frano Sulić, 'Suradnja Hrvatske s Europom', *Nova Hrvatska*, 25 October 1941.

³⁴ B. [Mijo Bzik], 'Pravi smisao rata protiv Moskve', *Hrvatski narod*, 23 July 1941.

nations against the 'shameful' Versailles system of 'democratic deception and tricks and capitalist imperialism'. He compared the struggle of new Europe in the East to a holy crusader undertaking a heroic battle for 'the salvation of the white race'. He, too, made an explicit link between the war in the East and the struggle against the Serbs, boasting that the Führer and his closest collaborators had expressed 'complete understanding' for 'our intentions and our work'. This included, he added, not just support 'for the eradication of the disastrous Serbian patrimony (*uklanja zlokobne srbske baštine*)', but also 'the elimination of the difficulties which have arisen in this time of war', in a reference to the insurgency then raging in the Croatian countryside in response to the Ustasha programme of genocide.³⁵

The high point of this Europeanizing discourse was an exhibition entitled 'The Struggle of United Europe in the East' (*Borba udružene Evrope na Istoku*). This exhibition, which opened at the premises of the international trade centre Zagrebački zbor on 27 November 1941, showcased the Nazi war against the Soviet Union and aimed to mobilize support for the Legion. The promotional poster featured the granite-jawed face of a Croat soldier in silhouetted profile between a German and Italian soldier with legionaries from other European nations behind them, each carrying the emblem of their party on their shield. A number of variations on this poster were produced for this exhibition, including one which proclaimed simply 'To the East!' The large public newspaper stand in the centre of Zagreb and state radio as well as the daily newspapers closely followed the exhibition, giving extensive coverage to the opening ceremony. A specially issued exhibition catalogue was also published.³⁶ The exhibition, the press reported, was a great success. The evening newspaper *Poldan* wrote that interest in the exhibition had been 'enormous' and in the first few days alone countless citizens had visited the exhibition rooms. In gazing at the individual exhibits, it wrote, they finally understood how much effort the 'European nation' had made over centuries to eradicate the danger coming from the East. And now the European people were fighting against Bolshevism, leading a merciless battle which would ultimately end in the 'complete destruction of the greatest enemy of European civilisation – Bolshevism'.³⁷ Generating a

³⁵ Mladen Lorković, 'Ustaška Hrvatska ušla je konačno i neopozivo u novi poredak, u novu Evropu, u novi svijet', *Hrvatski narod*, 1 December 1941.

³⁶ 'Borba udružene Europe na Istoku', HDA, NDH, ZŠ, 907.53/4; 'Na istok!' HDA, NDH, ZŠ, 907.58/2; 'Svečano otvorenje izložbe *Borba udruženje Evrope na Istoku*', *Poldan*, 27 November 1941, p. 4.

³⁷ 'Veliko zanimaje Zagrebcana za izložbu *Borba udružene Europe na Istoku*', *Poldan*, 2 December 1941, p. 2.

public perception that the exhibition was a success was important for a number of reasons. First, the exhibition's narrative provided justification for the decision to raise a volunteer force for the East. Given the close association with the struggle against Bolshevism, it also helped legitimize the state's parallel campaign against Serbs, Jews, Roma and ideologically and morally 'unworthy' elements. Most importantly perhaps, the exhibition was a test of the popular appeal and authenticity of the regime's discourse of Europeanization upon which the legitimacy of the state itself was based. Was Croatia, as Ustasha intellectuals insisted, leaving behind the traces of 'eastern' Balkan primitiveness and joining enlightened new Europe? Were Croat citizens really becoming imbued with Ustasha and hence European values? If so, what better way was there to manifest this than through the attendance of thousands of visitors at the exhibition who, they hoped, would then reproduce its core messages outside on the street, in their offices and at home among friends, work colleagues and relatives? Certainly, newspapers presented visiting the exhibition as an expression of support for the destruction of the Bolshevik 'hydra' which, as far as Europeans were concerned, 'threatened to corrode the healthy foundations of their existence'. Attending the exhibition showed 'the healthy instinct of a people united with its national forces'. While the exhibition had been organized by the German embassy in Zagreb, *Poldan* assured its readers that 'there exists great interest in this exhibition in Zagreb' and it expressed the hope that 'there will surely not be any citizens in our city who have not looked at the exhibition and not grasped who the common enemies of Europe are not just in the past but in the current time too'.³⁸ The organizers went to great efforts to ensure that citizens did visit the exhibition too. The State Secretariat for Transport ordered a 50 per cent reduction in rail tickets on the state railway for those attending the exhibition from 26 November to 30 January.³⁹ There were also special reductions on the door for group parties (with every tenth member receiving a free pass), military personnel and schoolchildren, while workers were only required to pay half price. As an additional inducement there was a daily screening of Fritz Hippler's 1940 anti-Semitic 'documentary' *Der Ewige Jude*, which argued that the Jew was an oriental barbarian who had left the ghetto to insinuate himself, chameleon-fashion, into European culture. For their part, visitors were expected to be actively involved in the success of the exhibition and were urged 'to draw the attention of all citizens to this important exhibition'. The organizers went as far as to place at their disposal large and small

³⁸ 'Europa u borbi protiv zajedničkog neprijatelja', *Poldan*, 28 November 1941, p. 4.

³⁹ 'Borba udružene Europe na Istoku', *Poldan*, 28 November 1941, p. 4.

advertises in two different colours which could be placed, they added helpfully, in store windows, shops and offices. The postal office also produced a special stamp for the exhibition which the organizers asked visitors to make known to friends overseas. In this way, they explained, 'the special Croatian stamp will spread throughout the world. The success of this exhibition relies on the involvement of every visitor! Croats, promote your exhibition!'⁴⁰

The opening of the exhibition was attended by Kvaternik and other Ustasha and youth representatives, foreign embassy staff, members of the Croatian, German and Italian high command, an international delegation of academics and the general public. In honour of the opening ceremony, the exhibition rooms and the outside of the trade centre were decorated with the German, Italian and Ustasha flags while units of the German, Italian and Croatian armies formed an honour guard and a military orchestra played the Ustasha and state hymns, the Horst Wessel Lied and the Giovinezza. The exhibition, divided into two parts, was accompanied by images, books, maps 'and all kinds of material' from which one could 'clearly understand' the historical development of Europe, its 'eternal' struggle for self-determination against 'numerous enemies' as well as the interconnectedness of European peoples who, together, successfully overcame 'common perils'. In his speech, Herman von Troll, representing the German ambassador Siegfried Kasche, observed that it expressed the community of European peoples and their desire for a new order and 'the future security of the new Europe'. Hans Hagemeyer, an official from Alfred Rosenberg's Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, meanwhile, historicized Europe's racial war, linking Croatia's struggle against 'undesired elements' to the battle for a new Europe through the ages. If Europe was writing a great part of the world history of humanity then the conflict with 'internal Asiatic peoples' had played a very great role in the writing of that history. But for Hagemeyer, the battle for Europe did not just mean a physical struggle for 'living space', but an intellectual conflict about 'two views of the world which are fundamentally, characteristically racist in their way of life and the formation of their people'.⁴¹

The specifically racist elements of the exhibition were spelled out in the review by *Nova Hrvatska* which underlined the centrality of

⁴⁰ 'Upute posjetnicima protuboljševičke izložbu u Z.Z.', *Poldan*, 28 November 1941, p. 3. For a detailed analysis of the film *Der Ewige Jude* see Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), esp. pp. 176–9.

⁴¹ 'Svečano otvorenje izložbe *Borba udružene Europe na Istoku*', *Nova Hrvatska*, 28 November 1941; 'Europa u borbi protiv zajedničkog neprijatelja', *Poldan*, 28 November 1941, p. 4.

anti-Semitic tropes to the exhibition, the campaign in the East and the defence of Europe from 'eastern' Bolshevism more generally. It pitted a youthful regenerated Europe against the decrepitude and corruption of international Jewry of which Bolshevism was simply the most violent manifestation. 'On one side in this current war can be found the young European peoples who are securing their own future and on the other side one finds capitalism, communism and masonry led by the Jews', it declared. Alongside rooms detailing the invasion of Europe by the Ottomans and cartographic representations of the 'penetration' of people from the East into western Europe, many others showed the arrival of the Jews from the East complete with maps identifying the routes of their arrival and 'dispersal' in Europe, the 'destructive work of Jewry and masonry against the progress of Europe' and the role of Jews in spreading revolution and Bolshevism. It was only thanks to the success of nationalism, the newspaper's exhibition commentary pointed out, that ordinary Europeans had been able to see the 'perfidious aims' of Jews who had strengthened themselves to such an extent in Russia that 'all anti-Semitism was banned and punished with the death penalty'. Inevitably, conspiracies against Croatia, especially those which tied its fate to that of Germany, were also an important feature of the exhibition. For example, a special room was dedicated to the First World War and the plan by the Czech pan-Slav politician Hanus Kuffner to reduce post-war Germany to a third of its 'ethnic space'. According to the Kuffner plan, too, 'Croatia would completely disappear from the face of the earth and would become part of a Great Serbia'. In this way, Germany and Croatia were linked as victims of a joint conspiracy and the Serbs as co-conspirators of not just the Jews but eastern Asiatics too.⁴²

Mobilizing Charity on the Home Front, Confronting Reality on the Eastern Front

The mass collection of gifts and cards for volunteers in the Legion was an important aspect of the campaign to mobilize support among citizens on the home front for the struggle on the Eastern Front. Although newspaper articles on the subject frequently suggested that this was driven by sentiment from below – a sign of popular support for the state's anti-Bolshevik crusade – it was actually organized by officials in the Ministry for Trade, Handicrafts and Commerce. On 22 November 1941, a ministerial section head issued a circular to commercial, educational and

⁴² 'Bogat sadržaj izložbu *Borba udružene Europe na Istoku*', *Nova Hrvatska*, 29 November 1941.

vocational establishments including business academies, technical, economic and domestic science training schools requesting their assistance in the production and collection of gifts for soldiers serving on the Eastern Front. 'As a sign of gratitude and in recognition of our brave soldiers', it began, 'students of all technical schools are joining a great undertaking in the collection of gifts for Croat soldiers. In this way, youth will also be carrying out its duty to the homeland and their contributions will delight those who stand exposed defending our homes and hearth.' With this aim in mind the administrators of all schools were required to instruct students and teachers without distinction to support 'with all their heart and effort' this undertaking of the Croat people. Collections were to be carried out in a way that suited the individual region and schools whether through collecting money or wool, old woollen goods and linen goods or any other goods which would 'delight' the soldiers. The circular suggested that students in female technical schools could produce woollen objects, knitwear and shoes and make things that would be of use for the soldiers. Goods collected were to be sent to the Croatian Red Cross in Zagreb with a label, 'For our brave soldiers', accompanied by a list of items. The important thing, the circular maintained, was not the way in which this 'noble work' was carried out by school administrators but that it was completed as soon as possible so that 'our soldiers have in their hands the gifts intended for them before Christmas'. A deadline for 15 December was set for receipt of goods to ensure all parcels would get to the front before Christmas with reports on what had been sent to be posted to the ministry at that time too.⁴³

In order to coordinate the gift campaign, the Committee for the Collection of Gifts for our Brave Soldiers was established, working out of the Red Cross office. It was chaired by General Ante Hočevár and its members included a number of 'worthy Croat women' and wives of prominent industrialists, court presidents, professors and colonels. According to a spokesman for the committee, it had been formed simply to organize the sending of presents to soldiers on the Eastern Front. The driving force behind the establishment of the committee, by contrast, had come from citizens anxious to send presents and cards to soldiers as 'a small sign of recognition for their sacrifices'. In fact, in recognition of the sacrifices of soldiers far from home, the committee instructed that each present should be accompanied by a Christmas postcard affixed with the greeting: 'Dear hero of ours! Your Croatian homeland as well as your entire race remembers You and wishes You a happy Christmas and

⁴³ Ing. Jušić, 'Skupljanje darove za hrvatske vojsku', 22 November 1941, Arhiv Republike Srpske Banja Luka, Velika Župa Sana i Luka, 74.5844/41.

New Year, praying to Almighty God that, at the conclusion of your victorious expedition, we will see you happy and healthy in our Independent State of Croatia and contented among your dear family. Long live the Poglavnik! For the homeland prepared! Christmas 1941.' The committee also organized the sending of presents to wounded soldiers recuperating in hospital. Meantime, it advised those wishing to send gifts to loved ones to also send their presents to the Red Cross with a label reading: 'Gifts for our brave soldiers.' The gifts would then be sent by the Red Cross and the State Labour Service to soldiers.⁴⁴

How successful was the campaign to collect gifts for soldiers on the Eastern Front? If the aim was to get the presents to the soldiers by Christmas, the fact that some individual campaigns did not finish until less than two weeks before Christmas Day suggests that the organizers had overly optimistic expectations of European postal services. On the other hand, if newspaper reports are reliable, the campaign succeeded in securing the participation of a number of institutions and societies, even if the extent of that participation differed regionally. The state media followed the progress of the gift drive in great detail, providing regular updates on the generous gestures by financial institutions, workers' co-operatives and patriotic individuals. The state banks promised to match any monetary donations; members of women's organizations in Zagreb and female high school students worked tirelessly, using donated wool to make knitted gifts for soldiers; and *Nova Hrvatska* reported that donations were pouring in from worker and co-operative societies. Nevertheless, in the middle of the campaign the committee strongly requested collective action be taken to ensure that throughout the state, and not just in Zagreb, woollen goods as well as materials which could be used to make gifts were sent. This suggested unevenness in participation outside of the capital. That did not prevent *Nova Hrvatska* writing optimistically that it expected 'great success' in this campaign because surely every house would have old woollen clothing which they no longer used and which instead could be donated to the committee. This was especially true of towns and cities like Varaždin, Osijek, Brod and Karlovac, it surmised, where artisan businesses were well developed and where they were bound to have a large amount of old woollen clothing materials at home. As well as campaigns on state radio, the newspapers and cinematic newsreels, the committee organized social events to encourage households and individuals to donate materials. It proposed two gala performances by the Croatian State Theatre and organized a tea party to take place at the Hotel Esplanade

⁴⁴ 'Darovi hrvatskog naroda hrvatskim borcima', *Nova Hrvatska*, 19 December 1941.

on 23 December, the last day of action, with another organized by the Society of Zagrebians. There was also a special performance at the Croatian Music Institute.⁴⁵

In some towns, campaigns to collect gifts were marked by local festivities; this was particularly the case where donation drives were viewed by the civilian and military authorities as having been especially successful. In the town of Koprivnica, for example, the authorities announced the organization of a series of festivities to celebrate the 'success' of the January 1942 campaign culminating in a march past by the army and a procession of citizens led by the town's lively Ustasha Youth organization and a marching band. This was a recognition, the daily party newspaper *Hrvatski narod* explained to its readers, of the 'love' Koprivnica and its outlying villages had shown 'towards the warriors' through the collection of woollen goods. At the same time, of course, it was a smart marketing gambit to induce yet more donations from a progressively disgruntled and materially deprived population as well as, presumably, a means of mobilizing the philanthropic instincts of more affluent individual and corporate subscribers.⁴⁶ As a quid pro quo, it worked in a similar way to the regular publication in newspapers of the names of enterprises and private citizens who had donated clothing and other goods in aid of Croat legionaries, Ustashes and, ever more, refugees from what *Hrvatski narod* called 'Bosnian Croatia' and who in return for their patriotic munificence got to see their generosity publicized in print.⁴⁷

Newspapers and magazines proclaimed the campaign a triumph at an early stage. In its 2 December edition *Poldan* wrote that the action had achieved 'unexpectedly great success' not least because 'members of philanthropic societies which have been collecting the gifts have been most warmly and sincerely received everywhere and wherever they went they were given something that will delight our courageous fighters'. The magazine claimed that around half a million kunas had been donated in the city of Zagreb alone while the Alliance of Financial Institutions had donated 1.3 million kunas in this 'noble cause'.⁴⁸ As well as collecting Christmas gifts for soldiers serving on the Eastern Front, the committee launched a simultaneous drive to collect goods for Ustasha militias such as the Black Legion which were engaged in the campaign to cleanse

⁴⁵ 'Prikupljanje darova za naše hrabre vojnike na istočnom bojištu', *Nova Hrvatska*, 13 December 1941.

⁴⁶ 'Proširena sabirna djelatnost rublja', *Hrvatski narod*, 16 January 1942.

⁴⁷ 'Produljeno sabiranje rublja za naše domobrane i stradalnike iz bosanske Hrvatske', *Hrvatski narod*, 16 January 1942.

⁴⁸ 'Hrvatski borci na istočnom bojištu dobit će lijepe božićne darove', *Poldan*, 2 December 1941, p. 5.

the state's eastern borders at the Drina and whose exploits were regularly featured in the cinematic newsreels. Across radio and newspaper the committee appealed for donations for Ustasha militia men fighting 'renegades' in Bosnia, Lika and other regions. Similarly, announcing the end of its own gift campaign for the Legion on 19 December, *Nova Hrvatska* announced that its next charity drive would target collections for 'our warriors who fight in the southern regions of our homeland against Chetnik-Communist bands'.⁴⁹ By highlighting the holding of gifts drives for Croat legionaries fighting on the Eastern Front and Ustasha militias engaged in cleansing missions in Bosnia – the East within – newspapers were aiming to underline to their readers the symbiotic nature of these two campaigns for the survival of the Croatian state. In the same way that Croat legionaries were waging a merciless struggle against 'Asiatic' Bolshevik hordes in the East for the construction of a new Europe, the continued existence of the Croat people was inextricably tied to the eradication of undesired and dangerous eastern population groups. As time passed, the list of 'undesirable elements' grew to include not just the Serbs, Jews and Roma, but also all those who were supporters of or sympathetic to the 'Asiatic' and 'Bolshevik' Partisan movement. By the time the 1942 gift campaigns were underway, newspapers were quite noticeably beginning to conflate the activities and identities of Croat legionaries in the East with those of the Croat Domobrans and Ustasha party militias in Bosnia. For example, in January 1942 Miško Žebić, the head of the State Leadership for Physical Education and Sport (*Državni vodstvo za tjelesni odgoj i šport – DVTOŠ*), launched a drive instructing sports clubs throughout the state to collect donations for 'our brave Ustashes and Domobrans who are now fighting in the middle of the fiercest winter for the New Europe' in which 'the Independent State of Croatia has its rightful place'. While technically only legionaries were fighting in the East, ambiguous references to the Domobrans and Ustashes, as in this case, served to impress in the minds of ordinary civilians that whatever their duties, wherever they were fighting and whoever they were fighting against, volunteer legionaries, Croat Domobrans and Ustasha militia men represented one indivisible unit of warriors fighting heroically and self-sacrificingly for the existence of the Croatian nation.⁵⁰

Despite the coverage given to the collection of gifts for volunteers enduring their first Christmas on the Eastern Front, it seems that many

⁴⁹ 'Prikupljanje darova za naše hrabre vojnike na istočnom bojištu', *Nova Hrvatska*, 13 December 1941; 'Darovi hrvatskog naroda hrvatskim borcima', *Nova Hrvatska*, 19 December 1941.

⁵⁰ 'Svijetao primjer', *Hrvatski narod*, 17 January 1942.

of the deliveries did not arrive on time. While the volunteers did celebrate the traditional Croatian Christmas Eve festival of Badnjak and saw in New Year's Eve 1942, Captain Franjo Andrišić noted in the entry of his log book for 2 January 1942 that although 'the new year of 1942 was welcomed in, there was much sadness that the presents from the homeland have still not arrived ... We are assured that the presents will be delivered as soon as possible.'⁵¹ A report by Captain Marijan Hrestak, a young military vet in the Legion, to the Armed Forces Ministry (*Ministarstvo oružanih snaga* – MINORS) of September 1943 indicated that packages only began arriving from Croatia in an organized fashion as late as spring 1942.⁵² However, like Andrišić, his report made clear that the failure of parcels and packages to arrive made the soldiers feel abandoned by people back home, giving them the impression that no one cared about them while their arrival in the spring had the opposite effect. 'In the beginning', he recalled, 'we just received private letters from the homeland; otherwise there were few people who remembered us. Then in March and April 1942 we all got packages from the homeland as well as from private initiatives.' The Committee for the Collection of Gifts, he went on, 'did a great deal for our warriors. Many soldiers with tears in their eyes looked at the contents of the packages and were happy that the homeland was thinking of them. Eternal thanks to the good hearts and worthy hands of the committee for those unforgettable moments conjuring up a small homeland in the distant Russian fields and steppes.'⁵³

Hrestak was one of the most prolific correspondents with officials and ministries back home. In his report to MINORS of September 1943 about the Legion's activities on the Eastern Front in the first two years, he recalled the formation of his unit and the initial difficulties it had encountered. First, there was the geographically-dispersed nature of the unit.

The work on the formation of the unit which lasted fifteen days was extremely difficult seeing as the unit was formed in a village six kilometres from Zagreb and the horses and men were regularly registered in the artillery barracks in Zagreb so officers, junior officers and Domobrans daily had to undertake the journey between Zagreb and the village of Prečko, every time there and back six kilometres and at the same time there were no means of transport except for one old cart.

⁵¹ Captain Franjo Andrišić, 'Kriegstagebuch no. 1', 3 Bat./ I.R. 369, HDA, NDH, D-2382, 1 January 1942.

⁵² In October 1942 the MHD became MINDOM (Ministarstvo Domobranstva) and then in January 1943 MINORS (Ministarstvo oružanih snaga).

⁵³ Capt. Marijan Hrestak, 'Izveštaj o sudjelovanju na istočnom bojištu', 9 September 1943, HDA, NDH, D-2389/3581, p. 6.

The first party of the unit left for Dollersheim by train on 29 July after a short induction and inspection by the commander, Colonel Dragičević, and the Poglavnik himself. Hrestak remembered that when he, as the divisional vet, arrived in Olšanka in Ukraine for the first time in September 1941, one of the first things that struck him was the expanse of mud.

On this last journey we understood for the first time what enormous and endless Russian mud means. While the power of the motorized vehicles lay immobilized by the sides of the road, our horses with exceptional effort pushed slowly along the terrain ... It was difficult to look at the exertion of these dear animals that we all helped in order to reduce their toil. The relatively meagre rations combined with the difficult and insufficient supplies greatly contributed to the horses becoming completely exhausted. There were numerous occasions where completely healthy and strong horses collapsed on the ground as if dead.

As well as an outbreak of septic hoofs among the horses, while they were resting in Prvomajsk Hrestak and his assistant noticed many other infections and ailments among the ill horses owing to 'meagre and insufficient feeding'. These included dermatitis, weak hearts and sores as well as a host of other diseases. For a while, the stable for the horses was the local cinema auditorium while the veterinary section slept in the projector's room.⁵⁴

Hrestak also recalled the close living quarters in barracks which the Legion shared with Romanians, Germans and Italians and the amusing cultural episodes it provoked. For example, he remembered, crammed together in unfinished barracks in New Russia, they had the chance to observe how the Italians cleaned their mules wearing masks, an 'amusement' which did not last long, however, because the entire cleaning process only lasted about two minutes. On the other hand, Hrestak was full of praise for his own comrades, describing them as 'upstanding capable men who always knew what they wanted' and the unit's commander Marko Mešić as an 'admirable and magnificent man'. This was especially commendable, Hrestak wrote, in view of the atrocious winter conditions which involved marching in temperatures of up to 41 degrees below freezing. The first winter he remembered as especially difficult because 'we were not in any way prepared for the cold'. Miraculously, though, cases of frostbite were minimal.⁵⁵

Hrestak's findings about life on the frontline were, if anything, magnified in other reports, in particular the daily reports sent to MHD. One report of October 1941, for example, listed a catalogue of injuries, the

⁵⁴ Hrestak, 'Izvjestaj o sudjelovanju na istočnom bojištu', pp. 1–4, 12–13.

⁵⁵ Hrestak, 'Izvjestaj o sudjelovanju na istočnom bojištu', 17 October 1941, pp. 7, 20–1.

desperate condition of the legionaries, the lack of proper clothing and, most of all, the extreme weather.

We hope with some confidence to get the regiment underway and set off at 5 am. But the weather conditions do not allow this. At 5.50 am the first snow begins to fall with ice and strong winds. We are without coats or gloves. The fingers are now encrusted with ice. Icy needles stab the skin of the face and hands. The fingers are becoming frost bitten on the steering wheels. It is impossible to drive. Because of the disappearance of the benign weather we can't push the wheels either. We carry the wheels on our back. Terrible facing winds. All the same, one pushes forwards with the greatest of human effort and without any food.

Two weeks later the snow had changed to rain but the weather was just as severe. 'At 5 am we had to move on further, but because of the cloudburst this was not possible. Once again, in the afternoon we move with great difficulty through the drenched ground.'⁵⁶ The vagaries of the weather on the Eastern Front was, not surprisingly, a dominant aspect of many reports and log books and had a direct influence on the morale of commanding officers and troops, quite apart from the practical difficulties it caused. The daily entries by Franjo Andrišić in the weather section of his log book provide a vivid description of the hostile weather as late autumn changed into winter and rain and muddy tracks gave way to ice, snow and impassable routes. The conditions for October and November were variously described as 'unsettled', 'rainy', 'raining and it is getting worse', 'extremely cold', 'overcast with huge amounts of mud', 'cold and beginning to snow' and 'overcast and extremely cold minus eighteen'.⁵⁷ Mounting casualties also had a significant impact on unit morale. A daily report of 17 October described the aftermath of a battle on the outskirts of Perekopa in which a number of legionaries had been wounded while others sought refuge in the wood for the night as the wounded were taken away. 'The regiment lost one officer and five soldiers while twenty were wounded. Sergeant Ivan Malički died because, with his platoon, he rushed at the enemy to release platoon three. He died heroically right in front of his soldiers.' Arriving in Filipovo, they were shocked by the devastation they found in the town. Arriving at 8 am they found that the bridge had not been completed and it took them until 11.30 am to reach the centre. 'Everywhere is a wasteland. The trams lie on the street mixed up with barricades and tanks. It is hard to advance.'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ 'Borbe prigodom proganjanja neprijatelja preko Poltave', HDA, NDH, D-2382, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁷ Captain Franjo Andrišić, 'Kriegstagebuch no. 1', 3 Bat./ I.R. 369, HDA, NDH, D-2382, entries for 26–8 October 1941, 2–8 November 1941.

⁵⁸ 'Borbe prigodom proganjanja neprijatelja preko Poltave', pp. 4–5.

That the harsh conditions which confronted many volunteers were difficult to cope with is borne out by regular reports of soldiers being sent home sometimes because, as one commander Mladen Markulj explained in a report of 25 September 1941, they were ill or 'incapable or morally immature', but at other times at their own request, even if this was subject to approval from their commanding officers. While the return of any legionary to the homeland was unwelcome, since it meant drawing on a finite number of reserve recruits, soldiers sent home were treated differently depending on the circumstance. Those sent home for disciplinary reasons or due to a lack of ability were subject to Spartan procedures and in his report Markulj listed the names of over 100 men this applied to. Their equipment was taken away and they were allowed to take home only personal items they had brought with them. In the cases Markulj mentioned he ordered that all their identifying insignia and documents be taken from them too, that they travel on a communal transport ticket issued by the regiment and that no one was to issue them with a special travel card. 'Only soup and bread for seven days should be issued to these men and not any kind of financial supplement', he added. By contrast, those sent home because they were ill, for family reasons or because they had been asked to take up service in the homeland, were treated with considerably more compassion. In the case of Bogomir Brajković who was returning home because he was ill, Vladimir Pogačić who was being allowed to return to register the birth of his son, and another unnamed soldier who was returning to take up a civilian position in the homeland, Markulj ordered that they be placed under the care of Lieutenant Pavao Lisac, the commander of transport. In the meantime, another member of Markulj's staff Colonel Grljić was to ensure 'the most comfortable means of transport for these men'.⁵⁹

An increasing number of soldiers requested to return home either because the reality of life on the battlefield did not conform to their imagination or, more often, for personal and family reasons. However, these requests were often declined, an indication of the manpower problems the Legion faced. An illustrative example was the case of Petar Jajčinović and his brother who had applied for permission to return home because, as they wrote in their request, 'we have found out by letter that our father, who right now is the only male in the household, has gone off somewhere unknown and the whole household is without supervision and collapsing'. In his letter to Markulj recommending refusal, their battalion commander, Ljubomir Broz, explained

⁵⁹ Mladen Markulj, 'Otpust iz pukovnije', 26 September 1941, HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, Feldpost 40.508, D-2385, pp. 402–3.

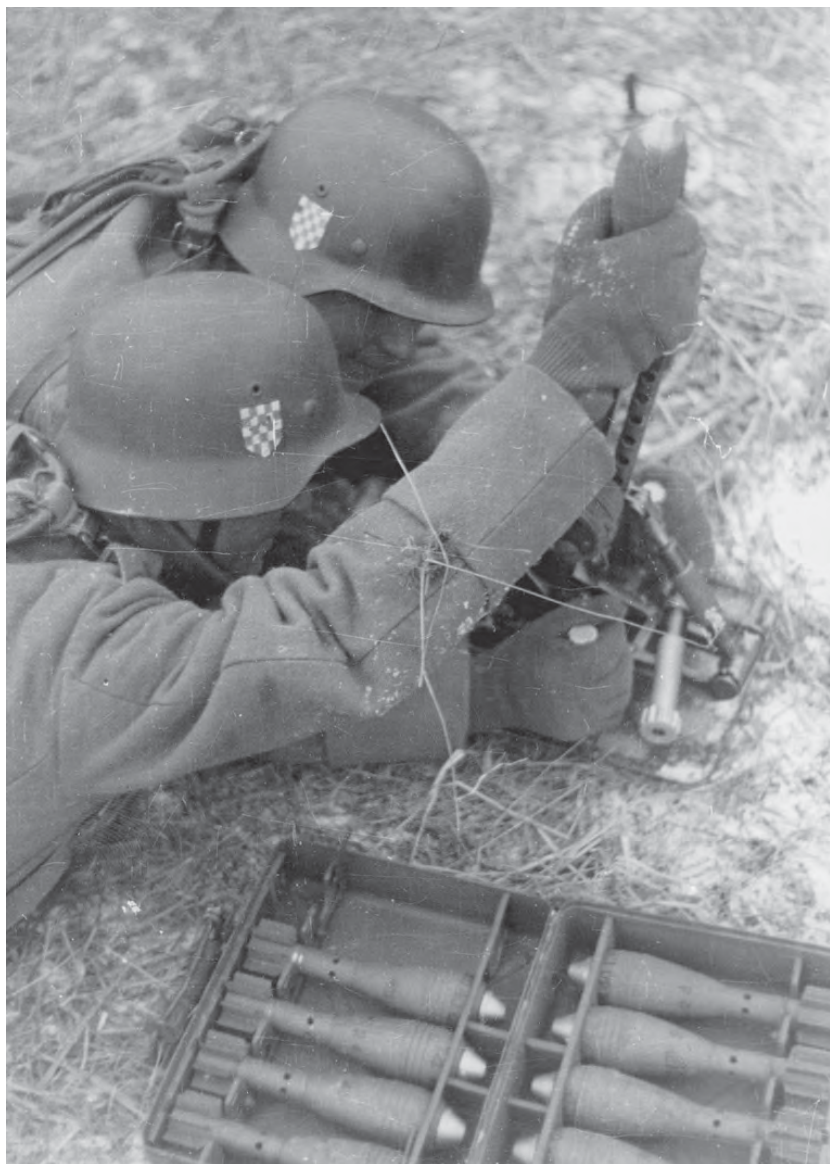


Figure 6.1 Croat soldiers training with live rounds on a 5 cm light mortar (late 1941).

his reasoning: 'I draw the attention of Domobrans to the fact that such requests are impossible when they have entered the Legion of their own volition and they should have taken this into account before they decided to become volunteers. However, they have remained steadfast in their attempts to return home and I am sending you the above for your knowledge and procedures.' In his report to army headquarters in October 1941, Markulj also refused permission on the basis that they had 'voluntarily joined the Legion'.⁶⁰

Many others made regular complaints about the conditions under which they served. Food rations were a particular source of contention and Markulj noted that while legionaries followed orders and regulations satisfactorily, they regularly complained that there wasn't enough bread. Furthermore, he warned his superiors that this was not just a problem with privates and other junior grades. 'Clear dissatisfaction in the ranks of the, until now, irreproachable officer class is growing further and their situation must be urgently resolved because in the event that it is not, it could have disastrous consequences for order and discipline in the army.'⁶¹ In fact, the food shortages were sufficiently severe that some soldiers who had been imprisoned did not even receive the reduced rations stipulated for soldiers imprisoned for insubordination.⁶² At the same time, Markulj, echoing the complaints of his own officers, griped about the offhand treatment of the soldiers and their families by the authorities. For one thing, he asked that the question of financial support for soldiers' families be resolved as soon as possible 'because there are still letters arriving from the homeland which suggest that individuals have not received this supplementary payment, mostly attributable to the wrong address which the Domobrans themselves have written down'. Markulj also noted insufficiencies in the delivery service and requisitions more generally, adding that 'wagons sent here from Zagreb with clothes and other materials have still not arrived. I am asking for an urgent delivery.' Even more seriously, Markulj requested the temporary replacement of 700 members of his Legion – infantrymen, soldiers, officers, unit leaders and doctors – due to exhaustion and ill health. Whether this would be actioned in full

⁶⁰ Ivan Markulj to MINDOM, undated, HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, Feldpost 40.508, D-2385/2658/9141, reel 531.

⁶¹ 'Izvještaj o vanjskoj i unutrašnjoj situaciji za drugu desetnicu (10–20) srpnja 1941 sastavljen iz primljenih dopisa', HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, Feldpost 40.508, D-2229, 4/24-2/84.

⁶² Report from Stožer Bojnice 2 Pješnice pukovnije, 8 August 1941, HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, Feldpost 40.508, D-2385. II/4-/24-2/84.

or part was doubtful because, as he insinuated, many volunteers suspected that, fundamentally, many officials on the home front, for all their eulogization of the sacrifices of the Croatian Legion on the Eastern Front, were disinterested in them, including officials at the top. He complained that 'after the successful battles of this regiment I sent the leader of the German Reich, the Poglavnik and the Field Marshal a telegram of greeting each. From the leader of the German Reich I received a telegram of thanks immediately. I am writing to find out what has happened to the telegram from the Poglavnik because up till now it has not arrived and this is very necessary in order to raise morale among my men.' On the other hand, perhaps he was expressing his frustration with the postal service again.⁶³

Of course, this is not the entire story: there were plenty of legionaries who, as reports from commanding officers like Markulj and officials like Babić indicated, demonstrated high levels of morale, excellent conduct, fearlessness and ideological zeal. Ironically, there appears to have been a positive relationship between the involvement of legionaries in military battles and the Legion's disciplinary record, with behaviour improving the more challenging conditions became. As Ivan Babić wrote to reassure Kvaternik in February 1942, 'twenty-three years of Balkan demoralisation have not, thank God, left a deep trace in the souls of our soldiers and here, at the first possible opportunity, the warrior character of our nation manifests itself in its full light'. He added, somewhat ambiguously, that their 'moral, disciplinary, fitness and fighting capability is far greater than it is thought in the homeland' and the Legion the 'best unit' of the Croatian infantry army.⁶⁴ The oblique reference to popular views about the fighting qualities of the Legion – probably fed by the stories of volunteers returning from the front or in letters home – suggests that there existed a significant gap between the idealized image of the Legion conjured up by state propaganda and what citizens were saying in the privacy of their own homes. Moreover, it illustrates the mental space which existed between legionaries on the Eastern Front and civilians on the home front. Soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front and civilians on the home front experiencing it through newspapers, magazines, newsreels, radio announcements and tea dances were joined in familial and national bonds and even

⁶³ 'Izvešće o moralnom stanja pukovnije', 11 November 1941, HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, Feldpost 40.508, VT 105/41, reels 546–7.

⁶⁴ 'Izvešće o moralnom stanja pukovnije', 11 November 1941, HDA, NDH, ZM 536.109/265, Feldpost 40.508, VT 105/41, reels 546–7; Lieutenant Colonel General Babić to Kvaternik, 16 February 1942, HDA, NDH, RH, ŽIG, 159.1549/s. 575.

sometimes a shared ideological goal in defending the new Europe and the destruction of the Bolshevik East. However, the evidence of disillusion on the part of legionaries who had only recently and enthusiastically volunteered for service expressed a more profound truth: soldiers and citizens, in the first five months at least, were not just separated by geography but a gulf in understanding too. Different fronts meant fighting different wars.

Conclusion

The fate of the unfortunate police officer who ended up crushed by a 'Victory' sign and the victory rallies which had preceded it in the summer of 1941 as the Croatian state entered the war against the Bolshevik East, serves as a metaphor for the history of the Croatian Legion on the Eastern Front in its first five months. It was a period in which a culture of public euphoria and the expectation of triumphant victory on the home front contrasted with frequent disillusion, arduous conditions and withdrawal on the Eastern Front. Publicly, the Legion was held up as a symbol of the new Croatia which was leaving behind the 'primitive' darkness of its Balkan past and moving towards an enlightened future as a valued member of the new Europe. The establishment of the Legion and the campaign against the Bolshevik East, however, was not just a statement of Croatia's membership of the new Europe, but also directly connected to the war the state was fighting on the home front to cleanse its borders of 'undesired elements'. The struggle for the new Europe on the Eastern Front and the struggle against Serbs, Jews, Roma and other 'eastern' population groups on the home front was mirrored by another battle to mobilize ordinary citizens in support of both wars as fundamental to the survival of the Croatian nation.

Daily newspapers, magazines and the state radio as well as various propaganda pamphlets and exhibitions about the war in the East and the struggle on the home front declared that these aims had been achieved: the Legion was progressing from one glorious victory to another, astonishing the German army with its fearlessness and demoralizing the Bolshevik enemy in the same manner that Ustasha militias on the home front were destroying the state's internal enemies. But the reports from the front and the growing complaints of ordinary volunteers suggested a very different experience of the new Europe. While Croatian society was being mobilized in the campaign to send Christmas gifts and messages to the state's brave and resolute volunteer soldiers playing their part in saving European civilization, those

same 'heroes' were being confronted by cruel weather conditions, hunger, the death of comrades, a lack of equipment, the indifference of officials and the public and finally, at New Year, the non-arrival of promised gifts and cards from relatives and compatriots. Ultimately, while the Legion was depicted as a powerful symbol of the new state's ambition to be a valued member of the new Europe, its contradictions were emblematic of a state which linked the struggle for a new Europe with the destruction of unwanted groups. In this sense, the Legion, caught between the war on the Eastern Front and another on the home front, was ever present, no matter how far its volunteers were from home.

Part II

The Volunteers

Xavier Moreno Juliá

The Blue Division – An Overview

On 21 July 1940 Hitler referred to attacking the Soviet Union for the first time.¹ It was in a conversation about the continuation of the war with the head of the German army, Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch and it was noted in a report sent to Colonel-General Franz Halder, the Chief of the Army General Staff. Halder, in turn, noted in his diary, ‘To smash the Russian Army.’ Between eighty and 100 divisions would be enough to annihilate between fifty and seventy-five ‘good’ Soviet divisions. The attack would be able to take place very early in autumn: everything would depend on the efficiency of the Luftwaffe over England.² Hitler’s ambition was enormous, but it was to materialize eleven months later, on the morning of 22 June 1941.³ It was, without doubt, his most profound military error, leading to both the end of Hitler’s regime as well as his life.

Spain fought in this war on the side of Germany between October 1941 and March 1944 with over 45,000 men. But the so-called Blue

¹ Translated from Spanish by Iain Stewart. I wish to thank Dr David Stahel for the opportunity to contribute to this collection. I am also grateful to Professor Enrique Moradiellos of the University of Extremadura for his advice and Professor Emeritus María Teresa Martínez de Sas of the University of Barcelona for all her help. To my daughters, Eva and Marta Moreno Solé, their efforts have been invaluable. The preparation of this chapter has been financed by funds from the Spanish Ministry of Economics and Competitiveness, Research Project HAR2012-30848. Abbreviations used in this study: ASHM (Archive of the Spanish Service of Military History), *Auswärtiges Amt* (German Foreign Office), BD (Blue Division), BM (*Botschaft Madrid*, German Embassy in Madrid), *divisionario* (member of Blue Division, in plural, *divisionarios*), DOGFP (*Documents on German Foreign Policy*), OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, German Armed Forces Command), OPSD (Operational Diaries), PAAA (*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts*, Political Archive of the German Foreign Office) and PaRSS (Private Archive of Ramón Serrano Suñer).

² David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany’s Defeat in the East* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 34–5.

³ The campaign should have been ready to commence on 15 May 1941, but the intervention in the Balkans was not foreseen, and on 30 April Hitler postponed it until 22 June. See: David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany’s Defeat in the East*, pp. 139–41.

Division only fought for two years: between 12 October 1941 and 12 October 1943 (later 2,199 men of the Division would fight as the 'Blue Legion').⁴ It cost almost 5,000 dead and more than 20,000 wounded and disabled, as well as some 400 prisoners, most of whom died in captivity. Some returned many years afterwards in 1954.⁵ The Blue Division (officially known as the Spanish Volunteers' Division) was to be the main military contribution by Spain in the Second World War.⁶

Much has been written about the Blue Division in Spanish, but there are two emblematic academic works in English.⁷ There are also relevant historical works: some in the form of memoirs⁸ and others in the form of novels.⁹ In total, there are hundreds of books and articles dedicated to the Blue Division.¹⁰

⁴ All of them are listed and described, both at a human and military level, in Appendix 3 of Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Legión Azul y Segunda Guerra Mundial: hundimiento hispano-alemán en el Frente del Este, 1943–1944* (Madrid, 2014), pp. 574–670. Once the Blue Legion was withdrawn, hundreds of Spaniards were to remain fighting against the Red Army until the end of the war, not as a unit, but as part of the *Wehrmacht* or the *Waffen SS*. See Carlos Caballero Jurado, *El batallón fantasma. Españoles en la Wehrmacht y las Waffen SS, 1944–1945* (Valencia, 1987).

⁵ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division. Spanish Blood in Russia, 1941–1945* (Brighton, Chicago, and Toronto, 2015), pp. 304 and 313.

⁶ Some thousands of Spanish Republicans were to fight in the ranks of the French and Red Armies, but their number was much less (perhaps 7,000 or 8,000).

⁷ Gerald R. Kleinfeld and Lewis A. Tambs, *Hitler's Spanish Legion: The Blue Division in Russia* (Carbondale, IL, and London, 1979), translated to Spanish as *La División Española de Hitler. La División Azul en Rusia* (Madrid, 1983); Raymond Proctor, *Agony of a Neutral (Las relaciones hispanoalemanas durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial y la División Azul)* (Madrid, 1972). Translated to English as *Agony of a Neutral: Spanish-German Wartime Relations and the Blue Division* (Idaho, 1974).

⁸ Perhaps the most significant titles have been, in chronological order, Enrique Errando Vilar, *Campaña de invierno* (Madrid, 1943), Antonio José Hernández Navarro, *Ida y vuelta* (Barcelona, 1946); Tomás Salvador, *División 250* (Barcelona, 1954); Luis Romero, *Tudá (Allá)* (Barcelona, 1957) and Dionisio Ridruejo, *Los cuadernos de Rusia: diario* (Barcelona, 1978). These works, by simple 'guripás' (Blue Division soldiers), have been complemented by publications from officers, but these are of a lesser literary quality. Thus, the second general to command the Blue Division, Emilio Esteban-Infantes, wrote *La División Azul (Donde Asia empieza)* (Barcelona, 1956); other works include: Colonel José Martínez Esparza, *Con la División Azul en Rusia* (Madrid, 1943) and Lieutenant Colonel José Díaz de Villegas, *La División Azul en línea* (Barcelona, 1967).

⁹ The best novel is *El desconocido* (Barcelona, 1956) by Carmen Kurtz. See also the work by Carlos María Ydígoras, *Algunos no hemos muerto* (Buenos Aires, 1957). He was a former *divisionario* who knew how to capture, perhaps better than anyone else, the agony of combat.

¹⁰ Approximately 500 books, including reprints, and between 2,500 and 3,000 articles. There is no up-to-date list of all works, partly because of their wide circulation in varied publications, although Carlos Caballero Jurado has worked on it. In 1989 he and his colleague, Rafael Ibáñez Hernández, published a list which recorded 132 publications (*Escritores en las trincheras. La División Azul en sus libros, publicaciones periódicas y filmografía (1941–1988)* (Barcelona, 1989). But in the 1990s publications multiplied and by the beginning of 2000 Manuel Liñán Pérez had accounted for some 400 books or pamphlets and some 1,200 articles.

The Civil War of 1936, Prelude to the Blue Division

Spain is a fratricidal country in that it has made civil war one of its principal defining elements. As long ago as the sixteenth century it had two, the War of the Communities of Castile (1520–3) and the War of the ‘Germanías’ in Valencia and Mallorca (1522–3); in the seventeenth century, there were two more, both wars of secession, that of Catalonia (1640–52) and Portugal (1640–68); one war more in the eighteenth century, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–15), and five wars and a battle in the nineteenth century (the War of the Aggrieved, 1827; the First Carlist War, 1833–40; the Second Carlist War, 1846–8; the Battle of Alcolea’s Bridge, 1868; the Cantonal War, 1873, and the Third Carlist War, 1872–6).¹¹

However, in order to understand what the Blue Division was and what it signified we need to revisit another civil war, the most destructive and recent of them all, that in the twentieth century (1936–9). The Blue Division was the result of this war, which saw a clash between two competing ideologies, and became a prelude to the European War, later known as the Second World War.

The Spanish Civil War was merciless, killing some 300,000 people (both Spaniards and foreigners), and obliging 500,000 more to seek exile. In addition, the war took a savage toll on non-combatants behind the lines, where the ‘disaffected’ were repeatedly murdered. Even when the war was won, the regime of Francisco Franco (El Ferrol, 1892), the *Generalísimo* of the Nationalist forces, supported by Italy and Germany, began a campaign of systematic persecution against the defeated. Imprisonments, shootings and sometimes strangulations (the *vile garrote*), were common currency for years, resulting in a death toll of no less than 130,000 people.¹² Nor did the violence all stem from the Nationalist side; in the Republican zone during the war some 50,000,¹³ maybe as many as 60,000, people were assassinated.

The church, treated brutally during the war (thousands of clergy were murdered in the Republican zone),¹⁴ and the army¹⁵ made up

¹¹ For a study of the wars in which Spain has participated see Juan Carlos Losada Malvárez, *Historia de las Guerras de España* (Barcelona, 2015).

¹² Paul Preston, *El holocausto español. Odio y exterminio en la Guerra Civil y después* (Barcelona, 2011); English Translation: *The Spanish Holocaust. Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London, 2012).

¹³ José Luis Ledesma (and others), *Violencia roja y azul. España, 1936–1945* (Barcelona, 2010).

¹⁴ Regarding the terror employed in the Republican zone, one should refer to *La Causa General. La Dominación Roja en España. Avance de la información instruida por el Ministerio Público* (Madrid, 1943). With respect to the church, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España 1936–1939* (Madrid, 1961) by Archbishop Antonio Montero Moreno remains fundamental.

¹⁵ For the Spanish army, see the works by Gabriel Cardona, *El problema militar en España* (Madrid, 1990) and *El gigante descalzo. El Ejército de Franco* (Madrid, 1993). Also fundamental is Stanley G. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford, CA, 1967).

the two fundamental elements of Franco's new state. Political parties had been prohibited with the exception of Franco's *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (FET-JONS). At heart Franco had united, by decree, the old *Falange* of José Antonio (*Falange Española*, FE)¹⁶ with the Carlists¹⁷ and the Monarchists of *Renovación Española*. He had managed this with the collaboration of a jurist, Ramón Serrano Suñer, who was a relation of his (their wives were sisters) and who in 1941 would become the 'father' of the Blue Division.¹⁸

After the Civil War, 1939–41

Between the middle of June and the middle of November 1940 Franco seriously considered joining the war as a German ally. On 23 and 24 October the Spanish and German leaders met at the frontier town of Hendaya, but there was no agreement because Franco wanted France's entire North African empire and Hitler was only willing to cede Gibraltar (Operation Felix). The most Hitler was willing to offer Franco was vague promises about North Africa which were to materialize after the war was over and, in any case, would require the approval of France.¹⁹

Hitler knew that he would not be able to hand over the French territories to Spain because this would mean the defection of Vichy troops to the British cause, but Franco and Serrano Suñer failed to understand this, and were angry that the Germans were being so considerate towards a country which they had defeated. Another aspect which played against Spanish aspirations was the fact that Hitler had been so impressed by the French defence of the port of Dakar (23 to 25 September) that he decided to push for an anti-British coalition

¹⁶ For the *Falange* see Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford, CA, 1961); Joan Maria Thomàs, *La Falange de Franco y Fascismo y fascistización en el régimen franquista (1937–1945)* (Barcelona, 2001) and José Luis Rodríguez Jiménez, *Historia de Falange Española de las JONS* (Madrid, 2000).

¹⁷ Carlism was a very important phenomenon in three of Spain's civil wars in the nineteenth century and during the war in the twentieth century. See Juan Carlos Losada, *Historia de las Guerras de España*, pp. 544–54, 558–86, 654–79 and 847–51.

¹⁸ See the reports from ambassador von Stohrer to the *Auswärtiges Amt* about Serrano Suñer, in the years 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940 and 1941, in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918–1945*, series D and E, Göttingen, 1969–1979.

¹⁹ When the meeting ended, Hitler stated: 'You can do nothing with this guy', while Franco remarked: 'The Germans are mentally unbalanced and rude.' PaRSS: undated note from Ramón Serrano Suñer. See also 21.11.1972, Barón de las Torres to Serrano Suñer. Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Hitler y Franco. Diplomacia en tiempos de guerra, 1936–1945* (Barcelona, 2007), p. 167.

which would include Pétain's France: the 'Big Coalition' (Germany, Italy, Spain and France).²⁰

Hitler's negotiations with Franco were set against the reverses suffered by the Luftwaffe, which made the Big Coalition an attractive option for Germany, but not Spain. Given the ruin experienced in the Civil War, Franco would only join Hitler's war with minimum risk (guarantee of victory in a few months) and with maximum reward (the acquisition of the French North African empire with the addition of Gibraltar). Hence, from Franco's point of view, obtaining Gibraltar and a vague 'promise' about Africa (subject to an agreement with France) did not compensate for the risks inherent in entering the conflict.

Accordingly, on 7 December 1940 Franco disappointed Hitler's request to join the war on the grounds that Spain was impoverished and 'was not prepared for it'.²¹ The plans of the OKW for German troops to enter Spain and on 10 January 1941 to attack and seize the Rock of Gibraltar came to nothing. Hitler despaired, 'I am very unhappy' he wrote to Mussolini as, with Franco's decision, the possibility of shutting the Royal Navy out from a western route into the Mediterranean was lost.

Franco knew of Hitler's annoyance, which even reached the point of a veiled threat (communicated in a note from the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop on 23 January). This is why, when five months later Germany attacked the Soviet Union and Serrano Suñer enquired about organizing a volunteer force to aid the Germans, Franco raised no objection.

Spain and the Attack on Russia

On the morning of 22 June 1941, the Wehrmacht crossed the Soviet border beginning a savage war of conquest, which Germany presented to the world as a defensive struggle against expansionist Soviet desires as well as a fight to save Europe from communism. Madrid celebrated the news with great exaltation and, not without some trepidation, began planning the Blue Division.

At 3.15 am on Sunday 22 June, 119 divisions of infantry and cavalry, nineteen armoured divisions and fifteen motorized divisions – a total of 3,050,000 men, 42 per cent of the *Wehrmacht*, as

²⁰ Manuel Ros Agudo, *La gran tentación. Franco, el Imperio Colonial y los planes de intervención en la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid, 2008), pp. 241–3, and *Franco/Hitler 1940: de la Gran Tentación al Gran Engaño* (Madrid, 2009), pp. 46–8.

²¹ 12-10-1940: Notes to document number 476, DOGFP, D-XI, pp. 816–17.

well as eighteen Finnish and twelve Romanian divisions – attacked the Red Army.²² The Spanish Embassy in Berlin telephoned Serrano Suñer at 6 am to inform him of events unfolding in the east.²³ A little later, with Ribbentrop's assent, the German ambassador Eberhard von Stohrer also telephoned to formally notify Serrano Suñer of the invasion and the supposed motives that had led to it.²⁴ Immediately afterwards, Serrano Suñer went to Franco's residence at the Pardo Palace, to inform the Spanish leader and express his desire that 'his' *Falange* contribute to the new war 'against communism' with a contingent of volunteers.²⁵ With this Serrano Suñer revealed what he and his intimate circle, which included the *Falangist* and writer Dionisio Ridruejo,²⁶ had assumed to be their duty in the event that war should finally break out against the Soviet Union.²⁷ Franco, in spite of being reticent when faced with the initiatives of others, did not oppose the sending of a military expedition from the start.²⁸ Serrano Suñer therefore proceeded to the German Embassy in the Paseo de la Castellana to inform Stohrer of the decision. Franco, he said, would send 'a number of units' of *Falangist* volunteers to Russia in recognition of the help received from Germany during the Civil War; however, he then qualified his remarks by adding, 'this should not be understood as an announcement of entry into the war'.²⁹ Somewhat disconcerted, the ambassador telegraphed the news to Berlin and asked the *Auswärtiges Amt* what reply should be made.³⁰

On Monday 23 June the senior members of the Spanish army also prevailed upon Franco with the request that they too be permitted to participate in the German-Soviet War.³¹ During the Civil War, the

²² Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Hans Dollinger, *La Segunda Guerra Mundial en fotografías y documentos*, vol. I (Barcelona, 1973), p. 372.

²³ *Solidaridad Nacional*, 6-24-1941, front page.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ 6-22-1941: Stohrer to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, PAAA, BM 6/9.

²⁶ With the passing of the years he would break with Francoism and become an exponent of the democratic opposition to the regime. There is an autobiography, *Con fuego y con raíces, casi unas memorias* (Barcelona, 1976), which appeared after his death, with a prologue by Salvador de Madariaga. His principal biography was written by his secretary during the last years of his life (from 1971 to 1975), Manuel Penella (who was later a professor at the Center of Hispanic Studies of Bryn Mawr College, Philadelphia), *Dionisio Ridruejo, poeta y político. Relato de una existencia auténtica* (Salamanca, 1999).

²⁷ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, p. 67.

²⁸ 6-22-1941: Stohrer to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, PAAA, BM 6/9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ 6-23-1941: German Information Post III in Madrid to Secretary of State of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, PAAA, R29741.

Falange had been humiliated on various occasions by the army's dominating role, which repeatedly saw the party subjected to its control. Now it had only taken a day for the army to impose itself once again upon the *Falangist's* project. Obviously Serrano Suñer and his circle rejected this as unacceptable interference, and in the ministerial cabinet which commenced that afternoon, he confronted General Enrique Varela Iglesias, the head of the army. At the very least Serrano Suñer wanted to preserve the voluntary character of the unit, but the encounter soon became acrimonious with Varela being called 'stupid'.³² According to Serrano Suñer's account (the only source available of the meeting) the general objected to the use of the term 'Blue Division' and accused the *Falangist* party members of meddling in military matters. Serrano Suñer retorted that he only involved himself 'in things Spanish and in matters of common sense'. Then Varela demanded to know why the division should not be considered a part of the Spanish army: 'Because, if it were', Serrano Suñer insisted, 'we would be at war with Russia!'

'To me, the clever thing about this division', Serrano Suñer told the author, 'is that the Germans should see us as sincere and that, in some way, with the modest means which we have, we take the path of action. But not as a nation, but some Spaniards who have the right to be pro-German and to be volunteers!'³³ Essentially, Serrano Suñer was seeking to walk a delicate line between rendering Germany tangible military aid in the east, while not formally becoming an acknowledged belligerent of the Axis alliance. Meanwhile as the Spanish press announced to the country the possibility of forming a 'unit of volunteers against Bolshevism', the *Falange* was already in danger of losing out to the army. Beyond Serrano Suñer's bitter experiences of losing out to the army in the Civil War, Franco had repeatedly warned him not to encroach on the army's authority as he was now doing.

Finally on Tuesday 24 June Berlin reacted with a telegraph from Ribbentrop to Stohrer. The Germans welcomed the volunteers, but insistent as always, tried to extract from Madrid the promise of a declaration of war against the Soviet Union.³⁴ This was a futile request as Franco's position remained unchanged since his meeting with Hitler in Hendaya and Stohrer knew it.³⁵ As expected, Franco imposed military

³² Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, p. 70.

³³ Declarations by Serrano Suñer to the author, 5-7-1994.

³⁴ 6-24-1941: Ribbentrop to Stohrer, PAAA, BM 6/9.

³⁵ Among Ribbentrop's shortcomings were his arrogance and, ultimately, his lack of intelligence. This is reflected in a magisterial manner by Michael Bloch, *Operation Willi. The Plot to Kidnap the Duke of Windsor July 1940* (London, 1984).

control over the expedition to the Soviet Union³⁶ through the appointment of Agustín Muñoz Grandes,³⁷ a general with *Falangist* sympathies. Muñoz Grandes was not a *Falangist*, but he had formally occupied the position of Secretary General of the Party. With this appointment Franco had finally put an end to attempts by the *Falangists* to prevent the army from leading the expedition.

When Stohrer met with Serrano Suñer he acknowledged that it would have been 'very difficult' for Spain to enter the war given the probability of an Anglo-Saxon commercial blockade.³⁸ Yet Spain's unwillingness to issue a formal declaration of war did not prevent the state-sponsored demonstrations in Calle de Alcalá and other main roads in Madrid when hundreds of *Falangists* shouted to denounce and condemn Russia (while being filmed). Serrano Suñer even made an appearance from the balcony of the Secretariat General of the *Falange* to incite the crowd with the cry 'Russia is to Blame!'³⁹ Further protests provoked by young people in front of the British embassy led to the ambassador, Samuel Hoare, and some of his officials to forcefully express their dissatisfaction to Serrano Suñer. Indeed after first enduring a tirade from Hoare, who referred to the Spanish as 'a country of savages', Serrano Suñer had them all thrown out of his house.⁴⁰ However the clashes between Spain and Britain did not end there.

On Wednesday 25 June, anti-aircraft batteries in the Campo de Gibraltar, under the command of Muñoz Grandes himself, opened fire on a British aircraft which flew over Algeciras. The British responded from Gibraltar and the Spanish returned their fire, in what was to be the high point of tension between the two countries.⁴¹ The following day (26 June), the British Foreign Office decided to put pressure on Madrid by means of a temporary embargo on petrol.⁴²

Against this backdrop the *Falange* made known the conditions of recruitment for the Blue Division. Men had to be *Falangist* members or

³⁶ Declarations by Serrano Suñer to the author, 5-7-1994.

³⁷ The first report which we have of this is in a communiqué from the German Embassy to Berlin on Saturday 28 June.

³⁸ 6-24-1941: Stohrer to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, PAAA, BM 6/9.

³⁹ Many years later in 1994, Suñer told the author that he had made a mistake. 'Russia is to blame!' should have been replaced by 'Russian Communism is to blame!'

⁴⁰ Samuel Hoare (1880-1959), first Viscount Templewood, who was Secretary of State for Air, India, and for Foreign Affairs (1922-35), Home Secretary (1937-9) and Lord Privy Seal (1939-40) for the Conservative Party. He was not very fond of Spain and the Spaniards (see his memoirs and compare them with those of his American counterpart Carlton J. Hayes).

⁴¹ 6-26-1941: Stohrer to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, PAAA, BM 6/9.

⁴² *Ibid.*

had served in the military. They had to be between twenty and twenty-eight years of age, pass a medical examination and be an ex-combatant (75 per cent) or ex-prisoner of war (25 per cent) in the Civil War. It was also at this time that the first recruiting stations for volunteers, the so-called '*banderines de enganche*', opened their doors.⁴³

The enlistment from both the *Falange* and the army took place between 27 June and 2 July 1941.⁴⁴ In total 18,372 men enlisted for service in the Soviet Union, a number which reflected fixed quotas from each of the ten military regions not the extent of popular interest in volunteering. Accordingly, the recruitment campaign was a success, except in Catalonia, where Carlists were not accepted, and in Navarre and the Basque country, where the Carlists refused to sign up. Generally, however, there was strong support for the war against Soviet communism, which was reflected by the over-fulfilment of officer and NCO quotas from the army. Indeed, a directive from the Central High Command stipulated that the army was basically to provide officers and NCOs looking for promotion, yet once the necessary quota of men in these roles was fulfilled the desire to enlist proved so great that the unsuccessful continued to sign up as simple soldiers (a process repeated by Valencian soldiers and civilians to cover vacant posts from the Catalanian quota).⁴⁵ It was during the last day of recruitment that Serrano Suñer gave an interview to the Madrid correspondent of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* in which he drew a distinction between the actions of the volunteers and the Spanish state. Spain would take part in the 'moral war', against the Soviet Union, but not participate 'in the real' war. He did, however, add that the Soviet Union was 'the most hated of the enemies of the Spanish people'.⁴⁶

Just as the military recruitment drive was a success, so too was the civilian campaign for *Falangist* recruitment.⁴⁷ As with the military recruitment drive, there were challenges to overcome such as the extraordinary case of the *Falange* provincial chief for Barcelona who, on a visit to the two centres of instruction in Catalonia (in the provinces of

⁴³ Circular number 124 of the Secretary General of the Movement. The 'Movement' was the name usually given to the *Falange* after the Spanish Civil War.

⁴⁴ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, pp. 83–94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86 and 99–100.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 92–3. Observe the idea of distancing themselves that such a concept establishes. In fact, in 1941, thousands of Spaniards had seen and continued seeing the Soviet Union as a model state to follow.

⁴⁷ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, pp. 94–5, 99 and 102.

Gerona and Lérida), tried to convince leading *Falangists* not to enrol. He was accompanied by the most influential *Falangist* in Catalonia, the writer and poet Luis Gutiérrez Santamarina. Both were convinced that the power of the regime in Barcelona was going to be seriously damaged by the loss of the men volunteering.⁴⁸ In spite of such interference the recruitment campaign remained a success. Initially these civilian volunteers were brought to military barracks, where the discipline left a lot to be desired.⁴⁹ When they were transferred to the outskirts of the cities with the object of receiving a short period of instruction (3 to 12 July),⁵⁰ more than one received a beating for not knowing or disobeying military discipline, which disheartened the less enthusiastic.⁵¹

The Making of the Blue Division: Germany (13 July to 19 August)

From 13 to 23 July 1941 the volunteers left for training in Bavaria transported in nineteen trains.⁵² Some of the send-offs took place with tremendous fanfare, while others were far more demure. It depended, in part, on the hour they took place (some departed at dawn).⁵³ During the journey across France there were altercations with local French civilians who gesticulated against them, threw stones and in one instance shots were fired. There were also some, a small minority, who greeted them in a friendly manner.⁵⁴ Things changed radically in Germany, where the Spaniards were the object of attention and curiosity and received huge receptions at some stations. In Germany, unlike France, they were able to rest easy and were offered refreshments by girls who, the men remarked, looked quite different from those in Spain.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ The provincial chief was Antonio Correa Vèglison. Luis Gutiérrez Santamarina ('Luys Santa Marina') had spent the Civil War in prison (his death sentence being commuted thanks to pressure from fellow writers).

⁴⁹ Declarations of the ex-*divisionario* Abelardo Azorín Ortiz to the author (Barcelona, 10 June 1994).

⁵⁰ DOPS of the BD, July 1941, ASHM, 28.33.1.2.

⁵¹ Declarations by ex-*divisionarios* Abelardo Azorín Ortiz and José Viladot Fargas to the author (Barcelona, 10 June 1994 and 18 November 1993, respectively).

⁵² Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Doctoral Thesis*, table 13, p. 321.

⁵³ 7-19-1941: 'Account of incidents during the rail journey', ASHM, 28.28.2.2, pp. 22-38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-42. We should not forget that France has a long history of embellishing its resistance activities and that collaboration was an important phenomenon, especially in 1941. In this respect, see David Littlejohn's classic *The Patriotic Traitors. A History of Collaboration in German Occupied Europe 1940/1945* (London, 1972), and more recently, and also a classic, *La France à l'heure allemande 1940-1944* (Paris, 1995), by Philippe Burrin.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-40.

On 17 July the volunteers began to arrive for their training at the Grafenwöhr military camp, where it would continue until 19 August.⁵⁶ Grafenwöhr was an immense location with trees, gardens and lakes, which was nothing like the Spanish training centres.⁵⁷ The Spaniards were surprised by the diversity of the equipment they were given, some 52 items, the use of which was not always clear to them. In addition their uniforms, which did not always fit, became the source of much amusement. What became important about their time at Grafenwöhr was the forging of the division's self-image, which had improved significantly. They were no longer a collection of volunteers with a blanket over their shoulders, a beret and soft shoes, but increasingly a cohesive professional force.⁵⁸ Moreover, the division was restructured to follow the German configuration of three regiments (as opposed to four).⁵⁹

The Blue Division's commanding general, Muñoz Grandes, instituted his own changes, which resulted from his irrational fears of 'corrosive elements' that he believed may have been introduced into his division in part by British spies. To counter this he established an 'Information Service' to root out 'the disaffected, backbiters and defeatists' by means of chosen individuals who acted as informants, but remained unknown to each other.⁶⁰ Muñoz Grandes also had to contend with problems which had arisen at Grafenwöhr between his men and the Germans. One of the chief sources of friction was the Spanish treatment of German women (those working in the canteens and even those accompanying German men). Improper comments and attitudes evoked anger and contempt among the Germans, ending in brawls and even the odd pistol shot.

Given the mounting problems at Grafenwöhr the best solution was the sheer speed at which the troops were trained, allowing them to set out for the east after just four weeks. The Blue Division was also intended to participate in the offensive towards Moscow, which created another pressure for rapid deployment. Perhaps because many of the Spaniards were already professional soldiers, the speed of their training did not appear to impact their ability to perform under fire, a fact which was to surprise German commanders.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, pp. 120–32.

⁵⁷ *Solidaridad Nacional*, 8-2-1941, back page.

⁵⁸ The list of the items received can be seen in Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Doctoral Thesis*, p. 349. The only noticeable difference between Spanish and German soldiers on the eastern front would be a small emblem with the national colours of Spain on the helmet and a silken badge with the same colours on the right arm (*Ibid.*, p. 350.)

⁵⁹ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, table 2, p. 124.

⁶⁰ 7-22-1941: *Instruction number 2001*, ASHM, 28.28.3.1, pp. 5–6.

⁶¹ 7-26-41: Annex 2 to *General Operational Orders Number 1*, ASHM, 28.1.4.1, p. 38.

Importantly, another consequence of this brief stay in Germany was Muñoz Grandes's agreement to distribute military instructions with Nazi propaganda, the latter being emphasized when he informed his men that no Spaniard should have a relationship with a Jew or Pole; in fact he even ordered that they should be treated as 'enemy agents'.⁶² Indeed there were two separate ceremonies (31 July and 3 August) in which the Spaniards pledged their allegiance to Hitler in his 'fight against communism'.⁶³ Organizationally, materially and perhaps somewhat ideologically, the Spanish Blue Division had now earned its new official designation – the 250th Division of the Wehrmacht.⁶⁴

From Germany to Russia (20 August to 11 October)

The march towards Russia began on 20 August. Given the adverse circumstances that they faced, it was not completed until 11 October, a total of fifty-three days on the road.⁶⁵ Bearing in mind that the Spaniards believed the Germans, and in particular the German army, operated with an abundance of motorization such an arduous journey undertaken mostly on foot was inconceivable to the men of the Blue Division and bad for morale. In total they marched for thirty-one days and rode trains for nine days at the beginning and thirteen at the end. Thousands of horses also accompanied the men, but many died or became sick on the march. There were also bicycles, some motorcycles and an insufficient number of trucks carrying their equipment.⁶⁶

The division arrived at Suwalki in the extreme east of what before the war had been Poland.⁶⁷ From Suwalki (or Grodno in Byelorussia, which was the arrival point of some trains) the Blue Division's march to Smolensk in Russia began, a distance of almost 900 km (the route they took was not direct). The march was planned in seven stages, stopping and resting after each leg, as it progressed through Grodno (Byelorussia), Lida (Byelorussia), Vilnius (Lithuania), Molodeczno (Byelorussia), Minsk (Byelorussia), Orsha (Russia) and before arriving at Smolensk

⁶² 8-29-1941: Postal Telegram number 90 of the BD, ASHM, 28.28.4.3, p. 28.

⁶³ The Spanish oath stated: 'Do you swear before God and your honour as Spaniards absolute obedience to the chief of the German Army, Adolf Hitler, in the fight against communism, and swear to fight as brave soldiers, willing to give your life at any moment on completing this oath?' DOPS of the BD, July 1941, ASHM, 28.33.1.2, p. 15. The form of the oath had been previously agreed with the Spanish and, by agreement, there was no reference made to National Socialism.

⁶⁴ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, p. 132.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–42.

⁶⁷ The account is in José Martínez Esparza's *Con la División Azul en Rusia*, pp. 139–43.

(Russia). A distance of 30–40 km had to be covered every day, sometimes by secondary roads, meaning that the men had to march for between seven and eight hours a day with short rests of between five and ten minutes every 6 km. During the march the division made up a column 30 km long.

As they marched closer and closer to the front the men exhibited a range of emotions. On the one hand, there was no lack of good humour with songs being sung and much laughter. There was also a keen trade with the local population for a range of products. Yet, on the other hand, the march also prompted well-founded fears of apprehension and anxiety, resulting from the abundant evidence of savage fighting. Ruined houses and destroyed military equipment were a constant reminder to the men of what awaited them at the front. There was also the human misery of countless refugees, columns of Jewish forced labourers and thousands of Russian prisoners of war heading for captivity. The Spaniards also suffered losses on the march, losing eleven soldiers in separate incidents, the worst being a mine which killed four men. The rigours of the march are indicated by the fact that over 3,000 men were deemed medically unfit for action by the end of it. In addition, forty-four horses died and another 957 were rendered unfit for service, while seventy-seven precious vehicles were damaged.⁶⁸

On 26 September Muñoz Grandes received an order changing the Blue Division's deployment to provide immediate reinforcements for Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb's Army Group North, which meant the Spanish would no longer take part in the offensive towards Moscow.⁶⁹ The order came from Hitler, but it provoked some anger among both officers and men as in their minds they were being transferred to a secondary front. Muñoz Grandes had personally met with Hitler in Rastenburg as recently as 1 September,⁷⁰ but what the Spanish did not know was that their redeployment was influenced by negative reports circulating in the German high command about the professionalism and behaviour of the Spanish troops. For example on 3 September Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, the command of Army Group Centre, included in his diary a report from a German liaison officer to the Blue Division:

⁶⁸ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, pp. 134–6.

⁶⁹ OPSD of the BD, September 1941, ASHM, 28.33.7.2, p. 15. Gerald R. Kleinfeld and Lewis A. Tambs, *La División Española de Hitler*, p. 102.

⁷⁰ There is no documentary account of what was said at this first meeting between Muñoz Grandes and Hitler. There were also two more meetings held at Rastenburg, on 12 July and 13 December 1942, but only brief references to them were published in the German press.



Figure 7.1 A Spanish recruitment centre for the Spanish Blue Division. The *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (FET y de las JONS) is the Traditionalist Spanish Falange and Committees of the National Syndicalist Offensive. It was the sole legal party of the Francoist dictatorship in Spain.

The Spanish view grooming the horses as a bother, feeding them unnecessary. Belts and suspenders are cut from new harnesses. Gas mask containers are often used as coffee pots. Dust and driving glasses are cut from gas masks themselves. If a Spaniard has corns, he cuts appropriate holes in his shoes and boots to keep them from chafing. Rifles are often sold. New bicycles are thrown away as they find tire repair too boring. The MG-34 is often assembled with the help of a hammer. Parts left over during assembly are buried. They consider all women fair game. In Grodno there were orgies with Jewesses, who were also taken along in their vehicles.⁷¹

Of course, such reports were at least as much a reflection of German embellishment and prejudice as any actual Spanish behaviour, but they represented a common perception within the German high command. The commander of the Fourth Army, Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, even questioned whether the Spanish were ‘soldiers or gypsies?’⁷²

In any case, the change of orders meant the men had to retrace their steps by almost 100 km, arriving in Vitebsk between 28 and 30 September. From here they were put on trains to Novgorod, a city at the extreme north of Lake Ilmen and on the west bank of the Volkhov River.⁷³ They finally arrived at the front on 11 October just as the cold began to make itself felt.⁷⁴

In spite of the fact that the Spanish viewed Novgorod as a secondary front, it was actually an important communications centre and had been one of the great cities of Russia’s forbears the Kievan Rus. By October 1941 the town was very badly damaged by the fighting and the Spanish command was based at Grigorovo, a small locality about a kilometre away.⁷⁵ This was the zone assigned to the Blue Division until August 1942, when the division would be sent by train in the direction of Leningrad, where it would remain until its deployment on the eastern front ended in October 1943.

Russia (12 October to 31 December)

Already by the middle of October 1941 the temperature in Novgorod was dipping below zero degrees centigrade.⁷⁶ It was still autumn, but in two months the coldest Russian winter in many years was going to begin

⁷¹ Fedor von Bock, *Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock. The War Diary 1939–1945*, Klaus Gerbet (ed.) (Munich, 1996), p. 303 (3 September 1941).

⁷² Gerald R. Kleinfeld and Lewis A. Tambs, *La División Española de Hitler*, pp. 55–6.

⁷³ OPSD of the BD, September 1941, ASHM, 28.33.7.2, pp. 16–17.

⁷⁴ OPSD of the BD, October 1941, ASHM, 28.33.11.3, p. 25.

⁷⁵ 10-30-1941: Report by the Spanish military attaché in Berlin, ASHM, 29.52.3.1, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

and the German army lacked appropriate clothing because, according to Hitler's plans, the campaign should now have been finished.⁷⁷

After managing to cross the Volkhov River and conquering some towns (Sitno, Tigoda, Dubrovka, Nilitkino), the Spanish offensive tired and ended on 29 October.⁷⁸ The Russian defences were too strong and there were ferocious counterattacks, to the point that on 23 October, three Soviet battalions attacked Sitno, where they fought hand to hand and killed or wounded eighty Spaniards.⁷⁹ The OKW took note of the action and transmitted news of it to Berlin the next day, where on 25 October the communiqué was reproduced by the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter*. In the course of the action the Spanish had taken 'hundreds of prisoners' (according to Spanish sources, 250 Soviet POWs were seized and another 250 were killed).⁸⁰

On 7 November the Spanish received new orders to relieve the forces of the 30th German Infantry Regiment deployed at Possad and its surrounding area.⁸¹ Possad was considerably further east of the area already occupied by the Spanish and was near the River Vishera. It was flanked by Otenski to the north and Posselok to the south, which were also to be occupied by the Spanish.⁸² From that moment the Spanish were established in their new positions the fighting was unrelenting. Already on 13 November Posselok had to be abandoned with 119 Spanish losses; Possad and Otenski were defended until the first week of December before they too had to be evacuated. The weeks of defensive fighting were an unforgiving introduction to the hardships of the eastern front. Temperatures dropped to between minus thirty and even reached minus forty degrees Celsius. The Spanish were without winter equipment and faced an enemy who was far better prepared. Accordingly, the Spanish fought in near hopeless circumstances east of the Volkov River, but they defended their positions, with high casualties, until the order to withdraw was given.⁸³

By 7 December Muñoz Grandes knew that the situation had reached breaking point and the order to withdraw, although nominally approved by Lieutenant-General Friedrich-Wilhelm von Chappuis (commanding

⁷⁷ For this situation see David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East*, pp. 440–1; Xavier Moreno Juliá, *The Blue Division*, pp. 161 and 167.

⁷⁸ OPSD of the BD, October 1941, ASHM, 28.33.11.3, pp. 31–4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸⁰ Gerald R. Kleinfeld and Lewis A. Tambs, *La División Española de Hitler*, pp. 146–7. OPSD of the BD, October 1941, ASHM, 28.33.11.3, p. 32.

⁸¹ OPSD of the BD, November 1941, ASHM, 28.34.1.1, p. 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸³ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Doctoral Thesis*, pp. 463–9.

the XXXVIII Army Corps),⁸⁴ had not yet arrived at Spanish headquarters. Thus, on his own authority, Muñoz Grandes gave permission for the retreat on 8 December. In terrible cold (minus forty degrees Celsius), the bulk of the division crossed the Volkov River⁸⁵ with the final remnants following the next day. The last Spanish detachments to cross the river only did so after burning Russa and Smeisko.⁸⁶

With the withdrawal completed, the Blue Division dug in to the west of the Volkov near Novgorod.⁸⁷ The new defensive line was, however, stronger with better artillery cover and good fields of fire across the river. In spite of the Red Army's local success the Spanish held their new positions throughout the winter although intermittent fighting went on.⁸⁸

In the week following the crossing of the river (from 9 to 14 December), the temperature rose somewhat, but then dropped again to minus forty degrees.⁸⁹ This resulted in many cases of frostbite in the extremities.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, small-scale local actions by both sides were a constant feature of life at the front. On 20 December a successful Spanish attack on a mill saw twenty Russians killed.⁹¹ Christmas Eve past quietly for the Spanish and was celebrated with carols, a good meal and brandy, but Christmas day saw the Soviets launch three serious attacks.⁹² Yet the worst was to come on the morning of 27 December when three Soviet battalions attacked one Spanish position and killed all of the defenders (twenty Spaniards and some German sappers). The Soviets also mutilated the corpses, which provoked a Spanish counterattack that, according to Spanish records, killed hundreds of Russians – a figure which may be explained by an order that prohibited the taking of Soviet prisoners.⁹³

Beyond their involvement in the military campaign, the killing of Soviet POWs raises the important question about the extent to which the Spanish involved themselves in Germany's war of annihilation (*Vernichtungskrieg*) in the east. In many respects the day-to-day interaction between the Spanish troops and Russian population was far

⁸⁴ Passed to the Reserve by Hitler in May, von Chappuis committed suicide on 27 August 1942.

⁸⁵ OPSD of the BD, December 1941, ASHM, 28.34.3.3, p. 42.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Doctoral Thesis*, p. 471.

⁸⁹ OPSD of the BD, December 1941, ASHM, 28.34.3.3, p. 44.

⁹⁰ Various notes from the OPSD of the BD, December 1941, ASHM, 28.34.3.3.

⁹¹ OPSD of the BD, December 1941, ASHM, 28.34.3.3, pp. 38–47.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9. 1-22-1954: Citation to the *Cruz Laureada de San Fernando* (the highest Spanish military decoration) awarded to Second-Lieutenant José Rubio Moscoso (the commander of the Spanish position).

closer than that seen in German areas of control. Indeed when the Blue Division relocated a substantial number of the local civilians left with them. The Spanish more or less lived among the Russians and appeared to be uninhibited by the racist ideology of National Socialism. This is seen from the fact that many Spanish soldiers took Russian girlfriends, some of whom they married and had children with.⁹⁴ Lidia Osipova, a young Russian woman who lived in the later area of Spanish occupation (near Leningrad), offers a rare account of Spanish behaviour from the Russian perspective. Writing in her diary on 25 August 1942, Osipova stated:

The Spanish received two lots of rations, one from the German army and the other from the Spanish, and what was left over they shared with the people. The civil population immediately appreciated the benevolent character of the Spanish who quickly established bonds of affection with the children. Such relationships were unthinkable with the Germans. When the Germans were moving their wagons they never allowed anyone, for any reason, to get on board. When the Spanish did so, the trucks and drivers were swamped with children. The *Josés* and *Manueles* walked along the streets surrounded by children hanging onto their arms and on their shoulders.

Another of Osipova's diary entries from three weeks later (17 September 1942) noted:

An event occurred which moved the population. A little boy (a war orphan) who was walking around begging, stole a loaf of bread, and he would have been shot (by the Germans) were it not for the energetic intervention of a Spanish captain.⁹⁵

While relations with the civilian population remained positive on many levels the treatment of Soviet POWs was, as seen earlier, much more fraught. There was no lack of *divisionarios* who killed them at point blank range after surrender⁹⁶ or robbed them of their boots, which condemned them to losing their feet from frostbite.⁹⁷ There is no documentation of

⁹⁴ For published primary accounts see the works by Dionisio Ridruejo, Luis Romero, Tomás Salvador as well as the unpublished testimonies of *divisionarios*. Photographic evidence is found in Gustavo Morales and Luis E. Togores, *La División Azul: fotografías de una historia* (Madrid, 2008) pp. 206, 300–8, 316, 356 and 418. For secondary sources discussing the special relationship between Spanish and local people see works by: Carlos Caballero Jurado, Xavier Moreno Juliá, Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, Juan Manuel Poyato, Ricardo Recio Cardona, and Francisco Torres.

⁹⁵ Translated from the *Diaries of Lidia Osipova*; Fundación de la División Azul, Madrid.

⁹⁶ Declaration by the *ex-divisionario* Antonio Franco Chocano de Zela to the author (Barcelona, 15 December 1994).

⁹⁷ Declaration by the *ex-divisionario* Juan Manuel Espejo Lara to the author (Barcelona, 20 February 1993).

this in the divisional files, but such instances were related to the author in oral testimony by veterans of the Blue Division.⁹⁸ Yet there were also exceptions to this behaviour, which even extended to the point of individual Soviet POWs being 'adopted' by Spanish soldiers or units who then became trusted companions. It was even said that soldiers could avoid sentry duty by taking an afternoon siesta and leaving 'their Russian' to keep watch with a rifle.

The treatment of Jews and Poles reflects the fact that there was anti-Semitism on the part of the Spanish, influenced no doubt by their Catholicism, which at the time portrayed Jews as 'the killers of Christ'. There is only a small amount of written testimony about this, but what seems clear is that Spanish anti-Semitism was cultural and not racial in character.⁹⁹ Indeed, Spanish behaviour towards the Jews was very different from that of the Germans. First, there is no evidence implicating Spaniards in the murder of Jews behind the lines. Second, some Spaniards had contact with Jews while in Grodno and clashed with German police when they tried to stop them giving out cigarettes and drinks. Third, the division's medical service made use of some Jewish nurses.¹⁰⁰ The Polish population, on the other hand, were not viewed by the Spanish with any suspicion and in fact were embraced for their shared Catholic faith. In fact, unlike other early German triumphs in the war, Spain had observed the invasion of Poland and later division of its territory with shock.¹⁰¹

Once the Blue Division was engaged at the front Serrano Suñer wanted the new Spanish ambassador in Berlin, José Finat (Count of Mayalde), to visit the wounded in Russia. This appeal met with difficulties from the German army, which was much more concerned with the progress of the campaign than facilitating diplomatic requests. Yet Spanish pressure was rewarded on 10 October thanks to the work of the German Secretary of State, Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker.¹⁰² After a difficult three-day journey,

⁹⁸ The author had the good fortune to obtain this information in interviews conducted with witnesses between February 1993 and April 2001. The various cassette recordings are in the author's private collection.

⁹⁹ A distinction acknowledged even by the Blue Division's detractors, mainly José Rodríguez Jiménez, *De héroes e indeseables. La División Azul* (Madrid, 2007) and Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, *Camarada invierno. Experiencia y memoria de la División Azul (1941-1945)* (Barcelona, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Doctoral Thesis*, pp. 412-13.

¹⁰¹ See: Bartosz Kaczorowski, 'España ante la invasión alemana y soviética de Polonia en septiembre de 1939' in *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 35 (Madrid, 2013), pp. 177-92.

¹⁰² 9-23-1941: Weizsäcker's note, 9-26-1941: Auswärtiges Amt's note, 10-4-1941: Weizsäcker to Ribbentrop, 10-5-1941: Sonnleithner's note, and 10-10-1941: von Grotte's note, PAAA, R 29742. Weizsäcker always showed himself to be receptive to Spanish wishes.

Finat arrived at Grigorovo on 24 October. The visit was short (only four hours long), but sufficient to obtain a full report from Muñoz Grandes and note his requests. The general wanted trucks (the Germans refused to give him any more), horses, coffee for the men and warm clothing (each soldier was sent to the front with only a blanket, underwear, a shirt and his battledress).¹⁰³

At the end of November 1941, Serrano Suñer made his third and final visit to Germany. It was merely a token visit, to attend the reaffirmation ceremony of the *Anti-Comintern Pact*, which was signed by Germany and Japan in 1936, and to which other countries were slowly added, among them Spain.¹⁰⁴ It took place between 24 and 29 November, the final day being the day on which Serrano Suñer met Hitler for the last time. It was a more relaxed encounter than those previously, as Hitler had an entire Spanish division fighting in the east with more volunteers than any of the other allied nationalities represented there. Spain meanwhile had managed to remain at the margins of the conflict and it had not been manoeuvred into any declaration of war.¹⁰⁵ Yet while Spanish-German relations were cordial, the campaign in the Soviet Union was clearly not going well for the aggressors. By the end of November, the hysterical optimism of the summer was long past. A speech by Ribbentrop in the *Kaiserhof* reflected the emergent reality. The Russian, he said, was 'a tenacious adversary' who was fighting 'with incredible devotion' and with 'an incalculable amount of materiel'.¹⁰⁶

Serrano Suñer returned to Spain on 30 November, the same day on which General José Moscardó arrived at Grigorovo.¹⁰⁷ Moscardó was a living legend in Spain, as at the beginning of the Civil War he had resisted constant Republican attacks against the Alcázar (fortified Palace) in the city of Toledo (some 70 km to the south of Madrid).¹⁰⁸ On 1 December, he crossed the Volkov River and, at Sitno, met with commanders and troops to preside over an act of homage to the fallen.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ 10-30-1941: Report by the Spanish Military Attaché in Berlin, ASHM, 29.52.3.1, pp. 12–13.

¹⁰⁴ The pact was signed in Berlin on 25 November 1936. Spain joined it five days before the end of its Civil War on 27 March 1939 in Burgos, the administrative capital of Nationalist Spain.

¹⁰⁵ According to Serrano Suñer in his memoirs *Entre el silencio y la propaganda, la Historia como fue. Memorias* (Barcelona, 1977).

¹⁰⁶ *Aspa*, 17 December 1941, pp. 3–20.

¹⁰⁷ Gerald R. Kleinfeld and Lewis A. Tambs, *La División Española de Hitler*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁸ There is some debate regarding who was behind the successful resistance at the Alcázar. Many historians agree it was Colonel Moscardó, but others state that it was the Colonel of the Civil Guard, Pedro Romero Basart.

¹⁰⁹ Gerald R. Kleinfeld and Lewis A. Tambs, *La División Española de Hitler*, p. 195.

Once back in Spain, Serrano Suñer wanted to visit the Blue Division, but the German high command would not allow it.¹¹⁰ The difficulties of hosting an official visit were soon greatly exacerbated by the start of the Soviet winter offensive on 5 December 1941 and Germany was now fighting desperately on the defensive. On 7 December Hitler received Moscardó, who had returned from his visit to the Spanish section of the front. He met Hitler at 1 pm and, while taking the official salute, the general made it clear that he was acting on behalf of Franco and wished to extend the Spanish leader's fullest congratulations and confidence in German victory. This, Moscardó stated, was not only because Franco 'wished it with all his heart' but because he followed the 'victorious' campaigns of the Wehrmacht step by step. Hitler listened through his interpreter and then escorted his guest to the map room of the high command where he informed Moscardó of the situation facing the Blue Division and its foreseeable outcomes, but nothing was said about the retreat of the German army before Moscow. When Hitler then commented on how the war was developing in North Africa, Moscardó expressed Spain's desire to eliminate the British enclave of Gibraltar, 'driven like a nail into the hearts of the Spanish'. Hitler, however, replied that he was sorry, but he was unable to do anything in this respect and that Franco had not taken advantage of the opportunity presented to him. There was little conversation as they ate together with guests immediately afterwards. When they said goodbye, Hitler politely asked the general to extend his most cordial greetings to Franco.¹¹¹

By the end of 1941 the number of Spanish dead had risen to 1,400, which was a small figure compared to the German total (some 200,000), but it made up nearly 8 per cent of the Blue Division's starting strength and they had all been incurred since September 1941.¹¹² The hopes of many *divisionarios*, who had joined Hitler's crusade in the east expecting to rapidly rid the world of Soviet communism, were now forlorn and disappointed. More to the point, Spain's war in the east had only just begun.

¹¹⁰ PAAA, R 29742: 1) 12-10-1941: Stohrer to Weizäcker, 2) Undated: Weizäcker to Stohrer, 3) 12-18-1941: note by Weizäcker, and 12-23-1941: note signed by Sigfried.

¹¹¹ 12-9-1941: Note of the meeting between Hitler and Moscardó, PAAA, BM 6/2.

¹¹² Xavier Moreno Juliá, *Doctoral Thesis*, p. 474.

8 The Netherlands

Evertjan van Roekel

Occupied

In the 1930s National Socialism gained absolute dominance in Germany. In the Netherlands, there was a distinctly different political environment. The Netherlands had long since lost its prominent position on the world stage and had more or less denounced any form of militarism. The defence of the country was no longer a priority, and the army was also severely outdated. It had remained neutral during the First World War and hoped to do so again in any future conflicts. In the 1930s the Netherlands was a stable democracy based on a constitutional monarchy, in which the different political parties worked together on a collaborative basis. The political system in the Netherlands consisted of mainly Christian parties with different backgrounds, socialists, and a very small group of national socialists, the NSB (*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging*, National Socialist Movement). This party existed from 1931 and was officially established in 1932. The NSB was anti-parliamentarian and authoritarian, with a focus on a strong leader, in this case Anton Mussert. The initial program of the NSB was actually a translation of Hitler's NSDAP, but racial doctrine and anti-Semitism were not prominent in their program. Even Jews were members of the NSB. In the first years after the establishment of the movement it seemed to be gaining popularity, especially among shopkeepers, civil servants and small farmers. Eventually its popularity diminished and during the elections of 1935, 1937 and 1939, the percentage of voters would fall from 8 per cent to 3 per cent. In the Netherlands of the 1930s there was little enthusiasm for National Socialism.

Meanwhile, the threat of neighbouring Germany had not gone unnoticed in Dutch politics. When England and France declared war on Germany as a result of the invasion of Poland, the Netherlands also mobilized its outdated army. However, it was hoping to remain neutral in this conflict. This proved an illusion. On 10 May 1940, Germany invaded the Netherlands without any warning. After five days of fierce fighting

against a superior enemy the Netherlands capitulated and was occupied by Nazi Germany.

Immediately after the capitulation the Germans presented themselves as benevolent occupiers who had only acted in the best interests of the Dutch people. From the German point of view it was preferable to cooperate with the Dutch than to dominate them. In Nazi ideology the Dutch people were seen as a Germanic brother nation, although they had a slightly lower status than the Germans themselves. As a result, it was not initially seen as necessary to subjugate the Dutch or treat them as an enemy population. The Dutch army was praised by the Germans for their heroic efforts during the fight, and the German and Dutch soldiers were, for example, buried next to each other at the Grebbeberg at Rhenen (where heavy fighting took place). Newspapers wrote articles about these 'heroic warriors that were united in death and found peace in a joint cemetery'.¹ The Dutch people generally accepted their military defeat as well as the subsequent occupation. There were in any case few other options so they made the best of the new situation. At first the conditions under German rule did not seem too bad. German soldiers stationed in the Netherlands behaved in an exemplary fashion towards the Dutch population and in the early months of the occupation the new regime imposed few restrictions. Even the Jewish population was left largely unmolested as the Nazi regime tried to win over the Dutch population.

The initial idea of collaboration, stemming from the classification of the Dutch as belonging to the Germanic community, soon encompassed the recruitment of soldiers for the Waffen-SS. The Waffen-SS could recruit men with non-German nationalities, whereas the Wehrmacht was originally restricted to German nationals. As a result, soon after the occupation of the Netherlands Himmler saw the potential of expanding his Waffen-SS by recruiting Dutch volunteers. The newly conquered territories, including Denmark, Norway and Belgium, were to be an important source of recruitment since, unlike in Germany, potential candidates were no longer able to enlist in the Wehrmacht. *SS-Obergruppenführer* Gottlob Berger was responsible for the recruitment of Aryans in the occupied territories with his *Ergänzungsamt*, which was the central recruitment agency in Berger's SS Main Office. More specifically, in the Netherlands the subsidiary *Ergänzungsstelle* in The Hague was led by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Karl Leib. Already on 26 May 1940 the *SS-Standarte Westland* was founded exclusively for Dutch recruits.²

¹ De Courant, *Gevallen op den Grebbeberg herdacht*, 21 May 1940.

² N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland: Documenten uit SS-archieven 1935–1945*, Deel I, The Hague 1976, p. 314.

The political platform of the NSB conformed largely to the ideological precepts of Nazism and the views of Hitler; however, they adapted their message to the Dutch situation. With the support and backing of the Nazi regime the party expanded its power, eventually becoming the only political party in the Netherlands. Yet Himmler considered it undesirable to recruit new volunteers for his *Waffen-SS* from among members of the NSB because he feared that it would deprive the party of its best people and adversely impact its important political work. In addition, no Dutch people were to be recruited from among the workers who had gone to Germany before the occupation. This, it was viewed, would take too much time, harm the German economy and look too much like forced recruitment, which would affect the exclusive character of the *SS*.³ Instead, Dutch men who were attracted to the Nazi regime, but had no existing relationship to it, were the main group to be recruited.

Throughout the war years, the process of recruitment would change, but the goal would always remain the same; utilizing Dutch resources and manpower to provision the German war machine. Importantly, however, Dutch men were almost never forced into German military service and the great majority of recruits volunteered of their own free will. Without the ability to coerce men into service, even during the later years of the war, the *Waffen-SS* was forced to create conditions that made it attractive for men to volunteer. In addition, it was not unusual that young men were recruited under false pretences. Recruiters, for example, promised volunteers a political education in Germany and a good job as a civil servant when they returned to the Netherlands. They had no idea that they would in fact be enlisting in the *Waffen-SS*.

The exact number of Dutch men joining the *Waffen-SS* voluntarily during the Second World War is difficult to estimate. Figures vary widely, but the most authoritative estimate is provided by the Dutch historian In 't Veld. According to In 't Veld the number of Dutch volunteers was eventually between 22,000 and 25,000 from a total Dutch population of approximately 9 million during the war. The Netherlands therefore yielded not only relatively, but also absolutely, the largest contingent of volunteers for the *Waffen-SS* from all the occupied countries of Western Europe. This number was however very small compared to the number of Germans who enlisted. Although the military contribution of the Dutch volunteers was not decisive, it was certainly not without meaning. Some units in which Dutch soldiers were active developed to be part of the elite of the German land forces as the war progressed.⁴

³ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 310 and 406.

Over the course of the war the Netherlands would collaborate quite significantly with the Germans, although the Nazi regime certainly never gained genuine popular support. In the first years of the occupation actual resistance was very limited. The vast majority of the Dutch population simply remained ambivalent. They waited to see what would happen, hoping that the war would pass them by, while they focused mainly on their personal circumstances. The Dutch who decided to actively collaborate by entering the Waffen-SS in 1940 and 1941 served in two different divisions: the *Standarte Westland* (later becoming part of the division *Wiking*) and the *Vrijwilligerslegioen Nederland* (the Dutch Volunteer Legion).

Wiking

With the establishment of the *SS-Standarte Westland*, on 26 May 1940, the framework was created within which the first Dutch volunteers for the Waffen-SS could enlist. A *Standarte* or regiment usually consisted of 2,000 to 3,000 troops. This was also the number of Dutch volunteers which the Germans initially hoped would sign up. When Dutch volunteers registered, it was not always clear in advance that they would be included within a military organization and be trained as soldiers. Although this had been intended from the beginning by the Germans, some volunteers were shocked when they arrived at the barracks in Munich and had a Waffen-SS uniform handed to them.

To others this came as no surprise, since they specifically enlisted in order to become soldiers in the SS. This was particularly true for those who were aware of the political ideals of the SS.

Standarte Westland was to have been the unit par excellence in which politically engaged Dutch volunteers, who were convinced of Nazi ideals, would serve.⁵ The recruits were sent to Munich where they were to receive their military training, which consisted of intensive exercise and, most importantly, iron discipline. Political education was also an important part of SS training. The Dutch volunteers were subjected to political lectures in which absolute loyalty to Adolf Hitler as Führer of the Third Reich was emphasized.

The SS officers who had to train the new recruits were generally opposed to the Dutch entering German military service. They saw the training of Dutch volunteers as a lowering of their status compared to the training of German recruits. The Dutch were viewed as inferior Germans who it was believed lacked good military comportment. Their frustration

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 315, 326, 329 and 403.

was mercilessly vented on the Dutch recruits, who, as a result, were forced to endure a strict and inflexible training regime.

SS-Standartenführer Hilmar Wackerle was appointed as the commander of the *Standarte Westland*. His appointment was typical of the SS organization, which favoured hard, ruthless men, especially for the *Waffen-SS*. Wackerle was in fact the first commander of the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, a position from which he was fired because of his extreme cruelty towards the prisoners.⁶ Wackerle was a former battalion commander in the *Waffen-SS*, who had participated in the conquest of the Netherlands. In the battle at the Grebbeberg at Rhenen, he had commanded a small elite unit which broke through Dutch lines and occupied an important railway viaduct. It was Wackerle's hard-won reputation for bold action and ruthlessness that saw him appointed to command the first Dutch volunteers in the *Waffen-SS*.⁷

As an equivalent to *SS-Standarte Westland*, the *SS-Standarte Nordland* was likewise established to accommodate volunteers from the conquered territories, mostly Danes and Norwegians. This unit was stationed in Vienna and Klagenfurt. However on 9 November 1940 *SS-Brigadeführer* Felix Steiner was charged with forming a new division (usually a division consisted of 10,000 to 12,000 troops) that would combine the two European formations with the *SS-Standarte Germania* consisting entirely of German recruits. This new division was initially named *Germania*, however this would soon prove to be troublesome as confusion arose between it as a division and the regiment in it with the same name. As a result, on 21 December 1940 the division's name was personally changed by Hitler to *Wiking* (Viking), to emphasize its Nordic character.⁸

The *Wiking* division was the quintessential portrayal of the new National Socialist order in which northern European volunteers would fight under German leadership. It was the embodiment of the new 'Germanic brotherhood'.⁹ The Dutch National Socialist racial theorist, Jan Coenraad Nachenius, described the role of *Wiking* as follows:

The division *Wiking* is the living representation of National Socialism, the guarantee of the ideal for which much will have to be demolished to make room

⁶ P. Pierik, *Van Leningrad tot Berlijn: Nederlandse vrijwilligers in dienst van de Duitse Waffen-SS 1941–1945. Geschiedenis van het legioen, de brigade en de divisie 'Nederland' in politieke en militaire context* (Nieuwegein, 1995), p. 73.

⁷ L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog VI, juli '42 – mei '43, eerste helft* (The Hague, 1975), p. 445.

⁸ P. Strassner, *Europäische Freiwillige die 5. SS-Panzerdivision Wiking* (Osnabrück, 1977), pp. 21–2.

⁹ P. Pierik, *Van Leningrad tot Berlijn*, p. 72.

for new construction. Not because it did not have any value and meaning, but because it stands in the way of the new.¹⁰

Brigadeführer Steiner was a typically hardened officer of the Waffen-SS, but he was also intelligent, pragmatic and well versed in military affairs. Moreover, he was a proven commander and one of the few SS officers who treated the non-German volunteers serving under him as equals.¹¹ As a result, relations between Germans and non-Germans in the division improved over time. The morale of the Dutch troops also strengthened and eventually *Wiking* would earn a reputation for being one of the Waffen-SS divisions with the most motivated and proficient troops.¹²

The diary of the Dutch eastern front volunteer Martinus Rauw¹³ suggests that there was in fact a genuine comradeship between the different nationalities within *Wiking*:

There we were, Germans, Dutch, Finnish and Danish. Real good fellowship prevailed here. There was singing, we had many good songs.¹⁴

The exact number of Dutch volunteers in *Wiking* prior to Operation Barbarossa is difficult to estimate. According to the Dutch historian Loe de Jong, in March 1941 there were approximately 1,400 Dutchmen serving in *Wiking* either in the *Standarte Westland* or in the *Standarte Germania*, which had started to accept Dutch volunteers.¹⁵ In early April 1941 the division was deemed combat ready and placed at the disposal of the Wehrmacht.¹⁶ From June 1941 until the end of the war *Wiking* was almost constantly deployed on the eastern front and took part in intensive combat against the Soviet Union.

The Dutch Volunteer Legion

Although *Westland/Wiking* was the first unit of the Waffen-SS in which Dutchmen were active, the largest proportion of the approximately 25,000 Dutch volunteers who fought for Germany in the Second World War served in the Volunteer Legion Netherlands. On 5 July 1941, two weeks after the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler agreed to found a Dutch

¹⁰ Vormingsbladen der Nederlandsche SS. Utrecht 1942. Verantwoordelijk voor den inhoud: SS-vorming, Afdeling VII-A van de stafleiding der Nederlandsche SS, februari 1942, 2e jaargang nummer 2, 290.

¹¹ L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog VI*, p. 445.

¹² N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, p. 327.

¹³ Except for Paul Metz, the last names of the Dutch Waffen-SS volunteers mentioned in the chapter are fictitious. This has to do with Dutch privacy legislation and liability issues.

¹⁴ NIOD. Access number 244. Archive title: *Europese dagboeken en Egodocumenten*. Nr. 991, M. R.

¹⁵ L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog VI*, p. 444.

¹⁶ N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, p. 327.

Legion.¹⁷ Five days later, on 10 July, the Volunteer Legion Netherlands was announced by *Reichskommissar* of the Netherlands, Arthur Seyss-Inquart. Officially the legion was founded on 12 July 1941 and was the first Dutch volunteer legion in the occupied territories. During the war it would be renamed the 4th SS Panzer Grenadier Brigade Netherlands (on 23 October 1943) and later the 23rd SS Panzer Grenadier Division Netherlands (on 10 February 1945).¹⁸ In the last year of the war, however, heavy losses in men and material rendered the 'division' only a division in name.¹⁹

Initially it was intended that the Volunteer Legion Netherlands would remain independent of the Waffen-SS and that the new Dutch formation would only support the SS, not be a part of it. The legion was envisioned to have a Dutch character, be led by Dutch officers and even fight under the Dutch flag. As such it would have to fight side by side with German troops in the so-called 'crusade against Bolshevism'. The Dutch were only obliged to fight as long as the war in the east lasted, and they would only be used against the communists. Service in the legion was not presented as direct collaboration with Germany or National Socialism, but rather as the defence of Europe against the threat of Bolshevism. In this way the Germans hoped to recruit Dutch nationalists and anti-communists who might not otherwise sympathize with the German regime. It was explicitly stated that they would not be deployed against the English. This, it was known, would bring about objections among the Dutch who might otherwise not enlist and, in any case, from the German point of view it was in the vast expanses of the east that additional troops were required. In principle the new recruits had to commit themselves for a minimum of two years of service in the Volunteer Legion Netherlands.

The retired Dutch Lieutenant-General Henry Alexander Seyffardt was appointed the commander of the legion. By Dutch standards Seyffardt had had an impressive military career. Already at the age of sixteen he was a cadet at the Dutch Royal Military Academy and after forty-six years in the Dutch army he had served as Chief of the General Staff and Chairman of the Defence Council. For a brief period in 1937 Seyffardt had been a member of the NSB. After the German occupation in May 1940, he had shown himself to be in favour of a close relationship

¹⁷ L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* V, maart '41 – juli '42, eerste helft (The Hague, 1974), p. 111.

¹⁸ J. Vincx en V. Schotanius, *Nederlandse vrijwilligers in Europese krijgsdienst 1940–1945*, Deel 2, Antwerp, 1988, p. 30.

¹⁹ N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, p. 372.



Figure 8.1 Lieutenant-General Henry Alexander Seyffardt hands a member of the Legion their flag before departing for the German-Soviet front (The Hague, 27 July 1941).

between the Netherlands and Nazi Germany and at the beginning of 1941 he even called himself a convinced National Socialist.²⁰

The Germans saw in Seyffardt the perfect candidate to act as the standard-bearer of the volunteer legion. He had been a distinguished member of the Dutch general staff, was a self-avowed National Socialist and was not a member of the NSB. The latter would prevent the legion developing a pronounced NSB character, which, according to the Germans, was not desirable. The Germans had also hoped that the name and authority of Seyffardt would encourage many Dutch volunteers, including perhaps officers who had served under him, to join the legion. Seyffardt would become the ultimate symbol of approval for Dutch military action in support of Nazi Germany. It was also for this reason that Seyffardt was seen as the figurehead of the Dutch military collaboration.

On the evening of 5 February 1943 Seyffardt was shot in his own house by members of a Dutch resistance group and he died on the

²⁰ L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog V*, pp. 110–12.



Figure 8.2 Volunteers from the Dutch Volunteer Legion are marching to the train station to leave for the German-Soviet front. The commander of the legion, Lieutenant-General Henry Alexander Seyffardt (second from left on platform), is saluting them as they march past (The Hague, 7 August 1941).

following day.²¹ Three days later, on 9 February 1943, the first regiment of the legion was named ‘General Seyffardt’, in honour of the general. The second regiment would be named ‘De Ruyter’, after the famous Dutch admiral of the Golden Age. Seyffardt was therefore associated with the most hallowed figures in Dutch military history.

In 1941 Seyffardt was under the impression that he would actually take command of a strictly Dutch unit, which would in fact form the nucleus of a new Dutch army. He was not aware in the beginning that the Germans had already reneged on their assurances and assigned the legion to the Waffen-SS. Indeed it was only upon arrival at the barracks that the Dutch volunteers found themselves being issued a uniform of the Waffen-SS. Suddenly, the exact status of the volunteer legion was called into question and the prospect of official inclusion into the Waffen-SS caused turmoil among the Dutch volunteers. The Dutch legionnaire Paul Metz described the circumstances in detail. While in Debica, Poland, as the Dutch volunteers were all being transported towards the eastern front in August 1941, the Germans tried to have them enlist voluntarily in the Waffen-SS:

²¹ N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, p. 339.

The day before yesterday the *Standartenführer* gave a speech again. This time the *Standarte Nordwest* and several Flemish regiments were also present. He encouraged us to enlist in the *Standarte Nordwest*. The training was much better in the SS, while men would be deployed more quickly. The SS would get the largest share of battle. In short, they were working on our honour to have us enlist freely in the SS. After this speech the *Untersturmführer* Auer came to us to clarify everything. The result was that from our company about 50 to 55 men went over to the SS. Our *Stabscheführer* too of course.²²

The new *Untersturmführer* of Metz's company, a man by the name of Piller, continued this policy of encouraging the volunteers to enlist in the Waffen-SS:

Piller also held another speech in which he tried to make clear to us that for young, strong guys the SS was the only way. After the speech, 50 more crossed over. Apparently it was not enough, because he said this morning that he would speak to us again. After that a dozen or so gave heed to his call. In our company now no more than 70 remain for the legion.

All kinds of rumours were circulating about what would happen if one opted to serve in each of the respective formations. Metz describes this uncertainty:

It is intended that we are going to Prussia first. Then the people for the SS will be sent on their way to Russia, while the legion will be sent to the area of Odessa. That will be as occupation troops I suspect. Anyway, I would rather go to Odessa than to Moscow. I am just not very fond of the cold. And it seems quite pleasant to me to spend another winter in a warm climate.

But I do not quite understand the intention to transfer the legion to the SS. Is it perhaps that they would rather have no Dutch officers? I immediately admit that Dutch officers cannot be compared to the German SS as soldiers. The [Dutch] officers must be trained first for about 6 weeks. Then they would be fit for the legion. As far as combat experience is concerned, these people obviously cannot be compared to the Germans. Notwithstanding that, I would rather be under Dutch command than among the Germans.

I cannot really put it into words, but I simply feel that I belong more to the legion, not to the SS.

In the next camp in Arys, Prussia, the remaining legionnaires were given a stark choice:

12 September 1941. This morning the *Standartenführer* (Otto Reich) again gave us a speech concerning the dissolution of the legion because that is what it actually comes down to. People had three choices: first, we could stay in the

²² NIOD. Acces number 244. Archive title: *Europese dagboeken en Egedocumenten*. Nr. 579, P.J. M.

legion, which would be trained by German people. Later Dutch officers would also be added and it would become part of the *Standarte Nordwest*.

The second option was to go on to the WA [the strong arm of the NSB following the example of the German SA], which would be trained in Holland, but by Germans. Later this regiment would be taken over by Dutch. This regiment would not be deployed as quickly as the first choice. The *Standartenführer* was planning to deploy the first regiment in late October. The WA regiment would not be deployed before May.

The third option was to go home. We were suddenly confronted with this alternative. I did not really know what to do. I was in doubt over whether to stay or go home. Since I did not know, I stood with the largest group and they went home. It was the majority of the men. Only a few men remained in the first regiment. Approximately twice as many went to the WA. But certainly 70 per cent wanted to go home.

The *Standartenführer* was really disappointed and began to be slightly sarcastic. He said, among other things, that this would make the leader Mussert rejoice. But he also said it would not be easy for us to be in Holland. He did not say what exactly awaits us. However, he asked members of the NSB to raise their hands. Then the NSNAP.²³ Then the men who were not members at all. The latter were the majority by far.

So we are going home in a few weeks. Peculiar sensation. I am neither happy nor relieved. I believe that this is the best solution, because I will not become a good soldier anyway. I also suspect I would have been rejected because I feel my body cannot tolerate that much physical exertion. My heart is not 100 per cent while my feet are too weak. Blisters all the time.

I could have stayed here just to have a job, but I am not really fond of that. I think the biggest drawback is the Germanizing. I cannot put it into words very well, but I feel that the Germans are trying to make us as German as they can. I will continue to fight this as long as I can.

Clearly, Metz had become disillusioned and wanted to avoid serving in the SS. He felt deceived by the false pretences under which he had been recruited in the Netherlands:

Now I can already say in plain Dutch that we have been cheated. They have said and shown us things that they could not justify. And not only the soldiers and the lower officers. No, also the senior officers feel deceived. Most of them I consider not 100 per cent Dutch, I am sorry to have to say that.

The first sign of deceit was in the propaganda campaign for the legion. This began with soldiers being portrayed in Dutch uniforms and the national colours on the helmet, so we would think these were distinct.

²³ The NSNAP was the Dutch equivalent of the German NSDAP. It was a very small political party that never played a serious role in Dutch politics. In late 1941 the NSNAP was forced to be part of the NSB since this was the only political party that was allowed by Germany in the Netherlands.

Evidently, Metz preferred go home and worked hard to achieve this. Eventually, however, it became also clear to him that returning home was never a realistic option. It was only another act of German deception. They would never allow the new recruits to escape from the clutches of the Waffen-SS and Metz knew it. He resigned himself to accept it. Finally, every thought of returning home and staying out of the Waffen-SS had completely vanished and on 12 January 1942, following a speech by commander of the legion Otto Reich, Metz noted:

Daddy Reich came and took away any illusions about going home. This was only a means to detect the cowards! The men who were with the WA had to stand up and [were told they] would no longer be members. Furthermore, we were told that if we would show ourselves being cowardly at the front, we would be shot. This would also happen if we harmed ourselves. Just so that we would know. This was actually not very disappointing to me.

The legion was therefore incorporated in the Waffen-SS, at first deviously and later forcibly. Symbolically, however, it had a different character than the other Waffen-SS formations. On their uniform the men wore a small shield with the orange, white and blue flag (a former Dutch flag and the symbol of the Prince of Orange during the Eighty Years War) and a '*wolfsangel*'; a rune symbol that was used by the SS, but also by the NSB. The legion had its own oath, which swore allegiance to Hitler as commander of the German Wehrmacht and not simply to the German Führer. In this way they were not bound to the person of Adolf Hitler, but rather obliged to follow his orders in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the German military machine. These were the only things that gave the legion a hint of 'Dutch' character and distinguished them from other formations of the Waffen-SS.

Even General Seyffardt had no real power and was in fact no more than a ceremonial figurehead. The officers of the legion also consisted mainly of Germans, who remained convinced that the Dutch did not have the required temperament and vigour to lead troops. Furthermore, they dismissed their military experience as inadequate and, while the Dutch might be seen as fellow Aryans with a rather high standing in the Nazi racial hierarchy, they were nevertheless viewed as inferior to the Germans themselves. Dutch volunteers were therefore often treated with contempt by their German comrades, which led to conflict and frustration within the ranks.

Motivations

In the aftermath of the occupation of the Netherlands, several motives played a role in influencing Dutchmen to join the Waffen-SS. At least

from certain nationalist perspectives the Germans seemed to be acting in the best interests of the Dutch people. There was hope that the Netherlands could again play a significant role in European affairs, even if only within a German context. Moreover, the flight of the royal family was seen by many as an abandonment of its own population in a difficult period. Some on the left questioned the continuing legitimacy of a monarchy, while those on the right saw democracy as weak and venerable, whereas National Socialism offered unity and strength. With a Dutch form of National Socialism now a *fait accompli*, complicity in the new regime could, at least initially, be seen as a reaction to the failed policies of the previous government. There were also people who were attracted by the display of German militarism,²⁴ which had been largely absent from pre-war Dutch society.

A National Socialist background was not always the main motivation for men joining the Waffen-SS. The proportion of volunteers who were also members of the NSB and/or the Dutch-SS (the Dutch branch of the SS similar to the German *Allgemeine SS*), was probably only somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent, with an uneven distribution across the various units in which they served. Furthermore, there were also numerous volunteers, especially for the Dutch Volunteer Legion, who signed up in the summer of 1941, driven by ideological convictions to take part in an anti-Bolshevik crusade, but without a pre-existing link to the NSB or National Socialism. They only wanted to fight against the perceived 'red danger' from the east and local Dutch/German propaganda propagated such fears, encouraging further enlistment in the legion.²⁵

The remainder of the Dutch volunteers could perhaps best be described as non-political adventurers, without ideological motivations.²⁶ For such men the Waffen-SS offered a unique opportunity to take part in historic events as part of an elite organization in which they would see more of the world. Characteristic phrases used by the Nazi regime, such as the danger of the 'international Jewry', left many Dutchmen completely indifferent.²⁷ Illustrating this is a passage from the diary of a Dutch volunteer in which he writes about his fallen friend Henk: 'Henk was six years younger. For him I played the role

²⁴ Documentary *Zwarte Soldaten*, Zuidenwind Filmproductions, Breda 2011. In this documentary elderly ex-Waffen-SS members are asked about their motivations for joining the Waffen-SS. Their answers pointed to the appeal of military power with its uniforms and marching soldiers. It also appeared that they believed in a brighter, more adventurous, future.

²⁵ N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, pp. 407–8.

²⁶ G. Verrips, *Mannen die niet deugden. Een oorlogsverleden*, Amsterdam 1998, p. 31.

²⁷ Armando and H. Sleutelaar, *De SS'ers. Nederlandse vrijwilligers in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Amsterdam, 1967, p. 16.

of the older brother. He was a member of the NSB, but had no idea of National Socialist principles. He often asked me for advice.²⁸ Even the first volunteers in the regiment *Westland* were not all convinced National Socialists. According to the Germans, they did not have a high level of political awareness. At most 30 per cent were members of the NSB, while only 5 per cent had any idea of SS ideology. Some were even outspoken anti-Germans. They criticized and tried to provoke the Germans in every possible way, for example by singing the Dutch national anthem.²⁹

There was also a segment of recruits with criminal records for whom service in the *Waffen-SS* was not restricted. Over time, the Germans even began to recruit in prisons and asylums.³⁰ The choice between captivity and the relative freedom and prestige of the *Waffen-SS* was an attractive alternative for many inmates.

Some Dutch volunteers joined only as a way to break the monotony of their daily routine, while others did so as a form of youthful protest against the wishes of their parents who disapproved of the German regime.³¹ The *Waffen-SS* was sometimes simply a career opportunity that seemed more attractive. There was also a category of men who enlisted because of its guaranteed regular meals and a steady source of income. In particular, during the winter of 1944–5, when food had become increasingly scarce, such enticements played a major role. It must be remembered, however, that people were never forced to enlist in the *Waffen-SS* by outright coercion.

For a few joining the *Waffen-SS* was an attempt to escape personal problems and may even be characterized as an act of desperation, which probably had little to do with the organization itself and what it stood for. As the diary of one Dutch volunteer illustrated:

I now doubt if this diary has value for anyone. They will find a person who fought to be normal. This person was not strong enough to be different. In any case, he could not handle life. This also explains his work in Germany and being a soldier. In this he sought to cure himself. I sought to live, but could not.³²

The Dutch literature concerning volunteers in the *Waffen-SS*, paints a mixed picture of idealists, misfits and adventurers. Ideology certainly

²⁸ NIOD. Access number 244. Archive title: *Europese dagboeken en Egodocumenten*. Nr. 1254, P. W.

²⁹ S. van der Zee, *Voor Führer, volk en vaderland*, Hilversum, 2008, pp. 144–5.

³⁰ L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog VI*, p. 441.

³¹ C. van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden, Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Amsterdam, 2001, p. 193.

³² NIOD. Access number 244. Archive title: *Europese dagboeken en Egodocumenten*. Nr. 1456, H. K.

seems to have played a role, but not necessarily the leading one. The volunteers themselves were sooner or later well aware that the Waffen-SS was a formation that was founded specifically to fight for political purposes and this negatively impacted the enthusiasm and eagerness of the Dutch.

The NSB and the Waffen-SS

The relationship between the NSB and the Waffen-SS was very important for Operation Barbarossa. Before the German occupation, the NSB had never played a substantive role in Dutch politics. Under the auspices of the Nazi regime, however, the party wielded political power that was disproportionate to its base of support. Immediately after the occupation the NSB presented itself as the pro-German party, or at least advocated many of the ideas inherent in National Socialist ideology. Yet the party also wanted to keep a specifically Dutch character.

Members of the NSB backed German forces during the invasion of the Netherlands and, accordingly, were immediately identified as traitors by a large part of the Dutch population. On 13 May 1940 Hendrik Kok, a Dutch SS-volunteer, who exhibited pro-German sympathies before the outbreak of the war, wrote:

Who knows how this will end? I have put myself in a dangerous position. It may lead to major dramas. There is a fanatical lust for murder among the good and peaceful citizens. They consider themselves entitled to lynch every German or kindred spirit ... Mr Beek said he will put poison in my eggs. This innocent old man would attack me. His son was fighting at the front for people like me [the NSB]. 'If he is killed, I will shoot and kill the first NSB member that I see.' What is the truth now? ... The morals of these ordinary, normal people or my morality?³³

Given the collaboration between the NSB and the German invaders, the anger of the Dutch population was often directed more against the NSB than the Germans themselves. Inevitably, after the occupation, this led to occasional clashes. On 20 July 1940 August Luiken, an NSB member, described what took place in Het Gooi (a region close to Amsterdam where lots of wealthy families lived):

My father has been fighting. There were many NSB members in the Hof van Holland [a restaurant] who were harassed by some Dutch Marines and other lanky, stupid guys. Father and mother were also in the Hof van Holland. When the Marines came in, and saw the NSB members sitting there, the fighting began.

³³ Ibid.

The NSB members advised the waiters not to let these 'gentlemen' in. They were however admitted, causing noise and fighting. Father got up and also punched one of these young men. The result was a huge riot.

Dirk and I went to Gooiland [another restaurant/bar]. Downstairs were all of the NSB members who had earlier been in the Hof van Holland. We went upstairs. Meanwhile, downstairs some dumb brute had pushed aside a member of the NSB. This resulted in some more punching and fighting. Eventually this brute was arrested. The member of the NSB [who he had attacked] was beaten half to death and several more members were wounded. It had been an unlucky day for the NSB.³⁴

Despite most of the people not having any sympathy for the NSB, with the help of the Germans it became the authoritative political entity in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the NSB had its own political agenda, which was not always fully consistent with what the Germans wanted to see. The relationship between the NSB and the Waffen-SS was initially guided by relations between the NSB and the Dutch-SS. Whereas the NSB strove to maintain a Dutch national identity within the German political context, the Dutch-SS focused entirely on what was considered desirable to the Nazi regime. This meant an annihilation of Dutch identity in favour of a singular Germanic society. The idea that the Netherlands was to be absorbed completely into the Third Reich was presented as the 'Great Germanic thought'.

Not surprisingly, there was little enthusiasm for this idea among the majority of the Dutch people. It also stood in stark contrast to one of the core principals of the NSB; that the Netherlands should remain a more or less independent country and that the influence of the occupier should be limited. Of course, this would also ensure the dominance of the NSB, for which its leader, Anton Mussert, had to overcome opposition within his own party. Meinoud Rost van Tonningen, an influential NSB member and an extreme anti-Semite, felt that the party had to conform more with German desires. These two competing points of view were generally referred to as SS-minded, for those favouring a Germanic cultural hegemony, and NSB-minded, for those who insisted upon maintaining a degree of Dutch independence.

Being NSB-minded, Mussert was initially strongly opposed to any enlistment in the Waffen-SS. In that early period it was only possible to enlist in *Standarte Westland* and Mussert expressed ardent objections to Dutch people fighting and dying in an organization that served only the strict national interests of Germany with no direct benefit to the Netherlands. To Mussert any Dutchman enlisting in the Waffen-SS was

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Nr. 1096, A.J. L.

also in fact committing treason since it was prohibited to join a foreign military. On the other hand, Mussert had to walk a fine line, knowing that any action which thwarted German plans would not prove very favourable to the position of the NSB. Given Mussert's attitude few NSB members enlisted in *Standarte Westland* and their numbers remained a minority. As a consequence *Standarte Westland* developed a strong SS-minded character.³⁵

It was in February 1941 that Mussert began to change his attitude. The Germans had warned him that if he did not cooperate with their plans, they would replace him with Rost van Tonningen as the new leader of the NSB. Determined to retain his position and fearing the NSB might be eclipsed by the Dutch-SS, Mussert suddenly sought to inspire as many NSB members as possible to enlist in the Waffen-SS. He tried to preserve them as a separate group bearing the mark of the NSB. As a result, he was originally not very fond of the Dutch Volunteer Legion, in spite of it having a general Dutch character. Some reports even indicate that Mussert at first banned campaigns within the NSB recruiting members for the volunteer legion.³⁶ But, under pressure once again, Mussert acquiesced and began actively encouraging NSB members to enlist.³⁷ In this way Mussert would at least try to ensure that the NSB made its mark on the legion. If he could not exercise direct authority over the legion, he would at least wield substantial influence through his high NSB membership within the ranks. The legion volunteer, Paul Metz, alluded to the prominent role of the NSB at a time when many Dutch volunteers wanted to leave the legion during its training in Eastern Europe:

The position of Mussert and the NSB is very painful and very difficult. For the Germans, they pretend that they find it awful that so many people want to go back to Holland. According to me, in their hearts they cheer for the fact that there are still people who do not like to be treated and cultivated as Germans.³⁸

During the training, the group that wanted to leave was divided into NSB members and non-members. The NSB members were addressed by a high-ranking NSB official named Van Geelkerken, who, according to Metz, focused mainly on preventing potential bad news concerning the legion and the NSB from reaching the Netherlands:

³⁵ S. van der Zee, *Voor Führer, volk en vaderland*, p. 51 and p. 146.

³⁶ NIOD. Access number 244. Archive title: *Europese dagboeken en Egodocumenten*. Nr. 1167, S.

³⁷ L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog VI*, p. 439.

³⁸ NIOD. Access number 244. Archive title: *Europese dagboeken en Egodocumenten*. Nr. 579, P.J. M.

The people who were not members of the NSB stood apart. This group was about twice as big as that of the members.

Van Geelkerken pressed us to say nothing negative about the legion if we go home. Although the legion was not founded by the NSB, 'they' think that it is. Therefore, extreme caution is necessary.³⁹

Metz believed that the NSB had real power over the legion and that Mussert would eventually solve all of their problems. Yet Metz's own record suggests that this was far from the majority view.

The officers, both Dutch and German, and also most legionnaires, are of the opinion that neither Mussert nor the NSB hold any power at all with regard to the legion. If that were so, then National Socialism for me would have no value. That is why I keep insisting that Mussert will never forsake us. That in a short time, we will be home again! That is my sacred conviction. My comrades think that I am mad.⁴⁰

With the authority of the NSB in question, the party called upon prominent members to join the legion and try to restore some of its lost prestige. However, the combat achievements of these men became a subject of contempt among their fellow Dutch volunteers. One man by the name of Spies observed well-known NSB figures that had come to fight on the eastern front:

Some leading figures from the NSB went with us, including the former leader of *Verdinaso*⁴¹ *Voorhoeve*, who later revealed himself to be cowardly and unworthy; and Leeuwenberg was not exactly a hero or an eastern front warrior.⁴²

According to Metz, the military exploits of the prominent NSB member Zondervan were also poorly regarded. His award of the Iron Cross was even seen as a downright insult to the other volunteers:

It has caused outrage among the boys that Zondervan has been granted the Iron Cross for his stupid articles about the eastern front. We have never seen him anywhere and as far as we know his activity in the war was entirely conducted behind a stove. I do not think he has ever even been on guard duty in the cold and no one will ever mistake him for doing some reconnaissance. He has not fought in Gusy⁴³ nor did he sleep in the snow at night. Let him do us

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Verdinaso stood for *Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal Solidaristen* (Association of Germanic National Solidarists). It was an authoritarian, political organization that was mainly active in Belgium and less so in the Netherlands. They were anti-capitalist, anti-democratic, anti-Semitic and strongly anti-Marxist. Their main goal was creating a larger Germanic state that was to consist of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Nr. 955, A. S.

⁴³ A village near Leningrad in which Dutch volunteers engaged in fierce fighting at the beginning of 1942.

a favour, let him shut up! Joys and sorrows shared with his men! Whatever! Yuck!!⁴⁴

Obviously the Germans had no objection to the ranks of the legion being strengthened, but they made sure that the NSB did not gain any real authority. Already in recruiting for *Standarte Westland* it was decided to preference men from outside the NSB and this policy was continued for the legion with the number of NSB members never becoming a majority. Nevertheless, relatively speaking a lot more NSB members joined the legion than *Standarte Westland* (and therefore later *Wiking*). This meant that in general NSB-minded attitudes were much more prevalent in the volunteer legion than among the *Wiking* volunteers.⁴⁵ Yet, the attitude of the NSB towards Waffen-SS volunteers would undergo a complete transformation during the course of the war from strongly negative to positive, eventually even encouraging its members to enlist and fight on the eastern front.

Barbarossa and the Netherlands

As mentioned earlier, among most of the Dutch population there was fear, or at least an aversion to communism, which Nazi propaganda reinforced. When the opportunity arose to actually fight communism some answered the call, but there was definitely not widespread enthusiasm to join the ranks of the Waffen-SS. The majority of the Dutch population remained ambivalent; they neither collaborated, nor were they part of actual resistance.

The attitude of the Dutch to the men who volunteered to fight in the Soviet Union reflected a mixture of responses. Some accepted it in line with the general hesitancy to oppose or become involved in political issues. Yet there was also a strong undercurrent of subtle questioning, which was evident even to the soldiers themselves. Volunteer Spies wrote in his diary about the departure of their train for the eastern front:

At the station there were, to use a technical term, 'a number of interested parties', which clearly considered us to be some kind of adventurers or foolish idealists *mit beschränkter Haftung* [with limited liability]. They also vented their opinions. They themselves were not so stupid to go on an adventure with an uncertain outcome. But it would be useless to try to convince them of our reasons. It was certainly nice to receive flowers, chocolates and cigarettes.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Nr. 579, P.J. M.

⁴⁵ N.K.C.A. in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, pp. 345, 409.

Finally, these folks were not that bad, but they could see little beyond their own interests.⁴⁶

While most Dutch people remained either passive or privately sceptical about their fellow citizens joining Hitler's war in the east there were others who deeply despised the Dutch Waffen-SS volunteers. Some of them did not even attempt to hide these feelings. This contrasted starkly with the people in Germany, as volunteer Metz described in his diary:

The German people were generally very cordial to us. The people on the land were all standing and watching as the train passed. When they had read what was on the train, they waved and greeted us warmly.

This contrasted with the Dutch people when we passed through the Netherlands. They looked at the train apathetically, or they made insulting gestures that left nothing to the imagination. One man made a gesture as if his throat was being cut with a knife. Another tried to make clear that we had to stay away and never come back.⁴⁷

The public aversion to supporting the Waffen-SS volunteers had other implications for the men once they reached the front. As their comrades began to fall around them, the lack of support at home became a source of profound frustration. There are many diary passages in which this frustration is expressed. For example Wessels writes in August 1941:

The thought constantly occurs to me, does all this have any purpose? Our people swear at us, slander us, and even write hateful letters to the parents of those killed here. I often doubt whether our people are worth our sacrifices.⁴⁸

Similarly, Spies writes:

I have also contributed my bit to maintaining Dutch honour in foreign lands. Even though there is nowhere with as little understanding of our true ideals as in the Netherlands itself. This has often made it difficult for us, especially when those who should have been our comrades, often had little understanding for our problems and hardships.⁴⁹

Although there was a small section of the Dutch population, especially among the collaborators, who saw the volunteers as heroes, defending their country against communism, the vast majority of the Dutch population remained critical. This allowed some to dismiss

⁴⁶ NIOD. Access number 244. Archive title: *Europese dagboeken en Egodocumenten*. Nr. 955, A. S.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Nr. 579, P.J. M.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Nr. 1073, M.J. W.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Nr. 955, A. S.

the volunteers as merely foolish adventurers, but others condemned them as traitors who fought for the German enemy. Although there was definitely a fear of communism in the Netherlands, Operation Barbarossa for most Dutch people remained something far from house and home, a matter of German interest in which they would rather not be involved in any way.

Summary

In the 1930s there was little support in the Netherlands for National Socialism. When the country was occupied in May 1940, the Germans initially sought to present themselves as a benevolent ally who only had the best interests of the Netherlands in mind. In their view the Dutch were a Germanic, brother nation, racially almost equal to the Germans themselves. The Dutch were therefore an excellent source from which to recruit soldiers for the Waffen-SS. Although collaboration was quite prevalent in the Netherlands, especially when compared to other occupied countries, there was never widespread support for the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, the Dutch contingent of volunteers in the Waffen-SS remained not only relatively, but also absolutely, the largest contingent of all occupied territories.

In 1940 and 1941 these volunteers would serve in two divisions. First, from May 1940 in the regiment *Westland*, which later became part of the SS-*Wiking* division. From June 1941 until the end of the war *Wiking* would be almost continuously deployed on the eastern front against the Soviet Union. From July 1941, a second division was formed in response to Operation Barbarossa; the Dutch Volunteer Legion. The propaganda for this formation focussed mainly on the fight against communism and, just like *Wiking*, throughout the war the volunteer legion would predominantly serve on the eastern front.

There were many different factors that motivated Dutch volunteers to join the Waffen-SS. Ideology was one of these, but there was also a wide variety of non-political motives. Some volunteers were attracted by the pageantry and dynamism of German militarism, for others the Waffen-SS represented an opportunity for adventure and an escape from monotony and routine. Sometimes the motivation was simply career advancement as well as the prestige and status of belonging to an elite organization. The beginning of the war against the Soviet Union appealed to a new group, who saw the fight against communism as vital for the survival of the Netherlands and Europe.

Another important factor in motivating potential Dutch volunteers was the position of the NSB towards the Germans, Operation Barbarossa

and the Waffen-SS in general. This attitude changed often during the first years of the war, until enlistment in the Waffen-SS was explicitly and without reservation endorsed.

However, the great majority of the Dutch people remained bystanders. They did not collaborate in any overt sense, but neither were they involved in active resistance. Although the volunteers who fought in the Waffen-SS against the Soviet Union were seen as heroes by a small percentage of the Dutch population that favoured the Germans, the vast majority looked down on them as right-wing fanatics and collaborators. In spite of this a relatively large number of Dutchmen voluntarily decided to fight on the eastern front, but they could not count on much support from their countrymen.

Joachim Lund

Introduction

Denmark's involvement in the German war in the east was determined by the limits and options of a small neutral, but occupied state. Joining Nazi Germany's war against the Soviet Union was a political issue that constituted a serious dilemma for the Danish government. There were no significant ideological obstacles to the decision: anti-Communism was widespread in the government as well as in parliament, among Social Democrats and labour unions, business and civil servants, and throughout most of the population. Prior to signing the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1941, the Danish Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning, who was also the leader of the Social Democratic Party, was asked about his opinion and replied: 'Communism? I've been fighting it for twenty years.'

The problem was neutrality. At the outbreak of war in September 1939, the Danish government confirmed the country's status as a non-belligerent country. The German occupation on 9 April 1940 did not officially change this situation. The Danish army was heavily outnumbered and, after a few hours of fighting, headquarters ordered it to give up the fight. No war had been declared between the two countries. Having protested against the initial infringement of Danish neutrality and the breach of the German-Danish non-aggression treaty of 1939, the government soon acquiesced to preserve whatever it could of its neutral status. By June of 1941, after more than a year of political compromise and concessions, the Danish government was not about to forsake all its efforts just because the Soviet Union had been invaded. Instead Denmark was to stick rigidly to its neutrality because this was the very basis of Danish-German relations.

In 1940 Berlin had opted for a mild occupation regime in Copenhagen, granting the Danish government room for manoeuvre – and, indeed, existence – provided it guaranteed the security of the occupation forces and ensured the suppression of anti-German voices in public. Denmark was also expected to conform economically as well as politically to

German hegemony in Europe and deliver whatever amounts of industrial and agricultural products Berlin wanted. If these conditions were met, Danish autonomy, such as it existed, would endure. The Danish experience of German occupation was unique in Europe, leaving negotiations between the two countries in the hands of the respective foreign ministries. In order for this to work Copenhagen, albeit under protest, temporarily accepted German protection (from the British) and was left to govern itself, while Berlin officially acknowledged Denmark's 'independence' and 'neutrality'. As the Danes fulfilled their part of the obligations, the Germans had more to gain by respecting Danish sovereignty than by imposing direct rule. Meanwhile to the outside world, Denmark could be made to look like a small, independent state which had voluntarily chosen to join the Nazi cause.

In spite of the Danish government's compliant attitude, Berlin soon began to pressure for changes in the Danish cabinet and political parties, and as the war continued, demands for military equipment as well as industrial and agricultural goods increased. The Social Democratic government, with its traditional social liberal coalition partner, the *Radikale Venstre*, had on 9 April included members of the liberal party *Venstre* and the Conservative People's Party and on 8 July 1940 admitted three non-affiliated ministers. The cabinet was divided over the question of how best to engage with Berlin's demands. One faction advocated a passive stance, reacting only to the demands made by Germany, while another grouping within the government advocated pro-actively seeking out issues of common interest with the Nazi state. These aimed for joint projects building Danish-German co-operation in order to encourage German goodwill and instil the impression that Denmark was willing to embrace the new European order. This second faction was led by the Danish foreign minister from July 1940 and prime minister from November 1942, Erik Scavenius, and backed by the remaining two non-affiliated ministers (Scavenius was the third) of Justice and Public Works.¹

The unique German-Danish relationship meant that, in contrast to Germany's real allies, no one expected Denmark to immediately commit its armed forces to Operation Barbarossa. However, the Danish government was also painfully aware that its 'neutrality' and independence came at a price and that German interests had to be accommodated.

¹ Claus Bundgård Christensen, Joachim Lund, Niels Wium Olesen and Jakob Sørensen, *Danmark besat. Krig og hverdag 1940–45* (Copenhagen: Informations forlag, 4. edn, 2015). For a recent account in English, see Nathaniel Hong, *Occupied. Denmark's Adaption and Resistance to German Occupation 1940–1945* (Copenhagen: Frihedsmuseets Venners Forlag, 2012).

In 1941–2, the question was how far the Danish government would go with regard to warfare against the Soviet Union, before its prized ‘neutrality’ was compromised. In the summer and autumn of 1941, heated debate ensued over involvement on the eastern front, but importantly none of the parties questioned the need to fight Bolshevism – every one of the coalition partners (including the Social Democrats) agreed on this point. The matter at hand was whether support for the German war effort would compromise neutrality. How could Denmark show its willingness to join the fight against communism while limiting its exposure to the war?

A number of options revealed themselves in the course of 1941. These included military efforts, but were by no means confined to them. Denmark’s response to Operation Barbarossa extended to much more than the battalion of volunteers it raised for the Waffen SS, although this played a crucial role and will be explored below. Already in 1941 the Danish government severed diplomatic ties with Moscow, issued a statement in support of the German aggression against the Soviet Union, banned communist activities and arrested the party’s leading figures, joined the Anti-Comintern Pact, set up a committee to take part in the ‘reconstruction’ (i.e. exploitation) of the eastern territories and supported Danish volunteer farmers for the German agrarian/colonization program.

Diplomacy and the Government Declaration

From the German perspective, Denmark was certainly expected to make a contribution towards the final destruction of communism. The form that this would take was to some extent left to the Danish government, and requires us to differentiate between concrete German demands on the one hand and, on the other, Danish attempts to win German goodwill by pre-emptive initiatives – ‘working towards Berlin’, to rephrase a well-known concept.² There is little doubt that Scavenius, who had favoured the conclusion of a customs and currency union with Germany in the summer of 1940, preferred to meet German demands even before they were raised. He chose not to consider the longer-term implications of his desire to appease German interests, since in 1940–1 he regarded the preservation of Danish ‘independence’ to be paramount. Scavenius’ opponents in government, however, astutely observed the danger of being drawn into a new geo-political situation in which Danish sovereignty had

² Anthony McElligott and Tim Kirk (eds.), *Working Towards the Führer* (Manchester University Press, 2003).

in fact been sacrificed for short-term goals, which inadvertently resulted in Danish interests becoming more or less identical to Germany's. This fundamental conflict over how to define Denmark's interests came to the surface almost every time the Danish government debated its responses to the war in the east.

Danish neutrality and German interests clashed when in the early hours of 22 June 1941, the German envoy to Copenhagen, Cecil von Renthe-Fink, requested that the Danish government cut off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and detain 'leading communists'. One could clearly speak of a violation of the state's sovereign right to receive foreign envoys as well as a breach of the Danish constitution, which left no room for political persecution. Yet the Germans' request was clearly not an invitation for protracted negotiations and a precedent had already been set in 1939–40 when the government had agreed to cut diplomatic relations to Poland, France, the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Danish police moved quickly and on the morning of 22 June raided and sealed off the Soviet legation. Telephone lines were cut, and members of staff and their families were prevented from leaving the premises. In Moscow, authorities immediately retaliated, detaining the Danish legation on embassy grounds. In Copenhagen, close contact was maintained between the Soviet legation and the Danish foreign ministry, which also provided a Russian-speaking liaison who eventually escorted the Russians to Turkey on 5 July. Here they were exchanged for the members of the Danish legation in Moscow, who had been recalled, seeing as there was no point in maintaining a Russian representation under house arrest.³

On 26 June the government issued an official statement on the German attack. The statement lauded Germany for having 'taken up arms in a struggle against a power which for many years has constituted a threat to the Nordic countries' welfare and prosperity'. It referred to

³ Paul Fischer and Nils Svenningsen, *Den danske udenrigstjeneste*, vol. 2, (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1970), pp. 175–92; Peter Munch, *Erindringer 1939–1942. Optegnelser fra og om besættelsestiden*, vol. 1, edited by Povl Bagge (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1967), pp. 158–9; Vilhelm Bergström, *En borger i Danmark under krigen. Dagbog 1939–41*, vol. 1, edited by John T. Lauridsen (Copenhagen: Gad, 2005), p. 373 (26 June 1941); *Samarbejdets mand. Minister Gunnar Larsen, dagbog 1941–43*, vol. 1, edited by John T. Lauridsen and Joachim Lund (Copenhagen: Historika, 2015), pp. 286, 362 (23 June; 29 August 1941). Sources concerning the immediate response of the Danish government to the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union are printed in *Bilag til beretning til Folketinget afgivet af den af Folketinget under 25. Oktober 1950 nedsatte kommission i henhold til Grundlovens § 45* vol. XIII 1–6 (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1954), pp. 1112–17.

the continuation of Finland's defence against the Soviet Union and celebrated the fact that this time Finland was not fighting alone. The armed confrontation was of 'mutual European interest' and Denmark could not be indifferent to the development. The statement resembled the declaration from a year before in which Scavenius, the newly appointed foreign minister, attempted to accommodate Berlin following the defeat of France by speaking of 'the great German victories that had struck the world with surprise and admiration'.⁴ In June 1941, however, it had taken the government three days of heated discussion to reach a compromise over the wording of the statement, in which the most pro-German phrases were dropped. According to Scavenius, Berlin expected some kind of statement from Denmark, but he also admitted that an official Danish declaration in support of the German attack was difficult to align with Danish neutrality. The balancing act now consisted of turning moral support for the Germans into a *de facto* declaration of neutrality.⁵

The so-called 'hidden ministerial crisis' a few days later should be seen as a direct continuation of the disagreements regarding the government's declaration of 26 June. The announcement in Danish newspapers on 3 July that the government had approved the mobilization of a Danish Legion for service in the Waffen-SS on the eastern front, provoked the hitherto fiercest confrontation between Scavenius and several of his colleagues in cabinet. There was widespread anger and frustration that the foreign minister took important decisions without asking for the government's approval and Scavenius was criticized for constantly submitting to German demands and wishes. The assumption was that a credible alternative policy existed, but Scavenius skilfully manipulated his dominant role within the cabinet as well as the lack of acceptable possibilities to bolster his position. Interpreting the accusations against him as a motion of no confidence, Scavenius stood his ground and resigned in anger, forcing the cabinet to realize that they had no one with the requisite stature to replace him or his foreign policy. Forced to acknowledge the harsh necessities of the political situation, the dissenting ministers backed down. Scavenius was persuaded to stay in office – but not until the entire cabinet had signed a statement for internal use, offering unanimous support for Scavenius' policy. It was almost a week before the dispute was settled and for now at least, the policy of active collaboration with Germany had carried the day.⁶

⁴ Niels Alkil, *Besættelsestidens Fakta I-II* (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1945–46) pp. 155, 185–6.

⁵ Munch 1967 vol. 1, pp. 160–8; *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, pp. 285–95.

⁶ Munch 1967 vol. 1, pp. 174–92; *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, pp. 302–21; Claus Bundgård Christensen, Niels Bo Poulsen and Peter Scharff Smith, *Under hagekors og*

Detaining Communists, Banning the Party

The second German demand on 22 June, concerning the detention of leading communists, had been left open to interpretation. Two of the three communist members of parliament were arrested (the party leader himself being out of town), an action which ignored their legal immunity. The party headquarters and the offices of the party newspaper were searched and then closed down. As far as the remaining party members were concerned, it was often left to local police officers to decide which communists should be defined as 'leading'. In total, 295 individuals were arrested either on 22 June or in the following days, including twenty-four participants of a summer camp for the 'Friends of the Soviet Union' association. Indeed the post-war criticism of the police for having been too eager to arrest Danish communists seems justified. The German police had provided the names of 'leading communists', but the Danish police had their own list. Of 147 people arrested in Copenhagen between 22 June and 22 August 1941, only twenty-two were on the German list. In fact the evidence suggests that 36 per cent of those arrested in Copenhagen and 22 per cent of those arrested in the provinces were rank-and-file party members, not qualifying as 'leading', and 21 and 11 per cent respectively were not even party members. One hundred and seventy-eight of those arrested were released shortly afterwards.⁷

We know little about what ordinary people thought about the German attack on the Soviet Union and the sudden persecution of the communists, who had so far been tolerated by Danish and German authorities. Even leading politicians were in doubt as to whether the German attack would cause a feeling of solidarity with the Soviet state, or if it would strengthen existing anti-communist sentiments. Only scattered individual opinions have been recorded.⁸ A well-regarded editor at *Politiken*, a leading centre-left newspaper, considered the public opinion to be sympathetic to Germany as far as the war against the Soviet Union was concerned.⁹ The editorial of the leading liberal daily *Jyllands-Posten* declared that: 'This time it is possible to wipe out Bolshevism completely, and this will have to be the goal of every civilized European people, seeing that Bolshevism is a plague on the whole world.'¹⁰ Børge Houmann, the

Dannebrog – danskere i Waffen SS 1940–45 (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 1998) (with an English summary), pp. 367–70.

⁷ Henning Koch, *Demokrati – slå til! Statslig nødret, ordenspoliti og frihedsrettigheder 1932–1945* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1994), pp. 269–71; 442–3.

⁸ There is a comparative analysis of diary entrances in Palle Roslyng-Jensen, *Danskerne og besættelsen. Holdninger og meninger 1939–1945* (Copenhagen: Gad, 2007), pp. 150–67.

⁹ Bergström 2005, p. 361 (22 June 1941).

¹⁰ Roslyng-Jensen 2007, p. 152.

manager of the communist party newspaper, later recalled how on the morning of 22 June, his neighbour greeted him with the statement ‘finally the communists are getting what they’ve been asking for’.¹¹ The Minister of Public Works, Gunnar Larsen, who was away with a delegation on 22 June, shared his spontaneous delight at the news, ‘since everyone present, including the Social Democrats, thought the Russians deserved a good beating’.¹² Not surprisingly perhaps, Larsen, who was also a leading industrialist, moved in circles with people who were happy to express satisfaction at the events and the fact that the Germans were doing the job for them.¹³ Another leading business manager, Knud Højgaard, was certain that 90 per cent of the population was in favour of ‘the war against the communists’. He was, however, contradicted by the former foreign minister Peter Munch, who argued that there were of course ‘rich circles who wished to put the communists down; but then many workers regarded this war as a war against the workers’.¹⁴

If the picture is blurred, it would seem safe to assume that the growing support for the communist party later in the war – gaining an astonishing 12.5 per cent of the votes at the first free post-war elections in October 1945 – is related to the party’s leading role in the resistance from 1942, the US-UK-USSR alliance, and the Red Army’s success on the eastern front. Before this, the party had never been very popular in Denmark. Established in 1919, it was not represented in parliament until 1932, gaining two seats out of 150, and it only had a few thousand members. Communists did, however, win support in the unions and especially among non-skilled workers where they posed a challenge to the leading position of the Social Democratic Party. There was much bad blood between the two groups, and the Social Democrats could indeed be counted among the communists’ most vigorous adversaries, especially given the upsurge in support for the communists at the April 1939 election. Here they won more than 40,000 votes or almost 2.5 per cent, gaining three seats. Yet whatever support the communists might have gained from the economic crisis, unemployment and from adopting a clear stance against fascism, support quickly decreased after Moscow’s non-aggression pact with Berlin in August 1939 and the Winter War of 1939–40, which sparked a wave of solidarity with the Finns in the Danish population. The party lost 500, or one-ninth, of its members and at public meetings the audience pelted leading communists with eggs

¹¹ Børge Houmann, *Kommunist under besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Vindrose, 1990), p. 13.

¹² *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, pp. 283–4 (22 June 1941).

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 287, 304 (24 June; 4–7 July 1941).

¹⁴ Munch 1967 vol. 1, p. 193.

and potatoes. By the time Germany occupied Denmark, the party had become more isolated than ever.¹⁵

If it is difficult to pin down how most Danes reacted to the events in the east in the summer of 1941, we must bear in mind that opinions and emotions were constantly shifting. Confronted with the prospect of Soviet victory, some preferred to be dominated by the Germans – a point of view which was enthusiastically advertized in the Danish broadcasting service by the well-known geo-politician, Professor Gudmund Hatt, of Copenhagen University.¹⁶ Others sided with the Russians, because a protracted war in the east would give the British a welcome respite. Some found it pointless to choose sides and simply stated that ‘now the two vampires are eating each other up on the Russian steppes’.¹⁷ In August, in an interview with a Swedish newspaper, Prime Minister Stauning declared that the public’s attitude towards Germany had improved after the attack on the Soviet Union. Yet internal government papers at this time revealed a widespread feeling among cabinet ministers that public opinion was definitely anti-German. We know little about where anti-German feelings ended and anti-Bolshevik feelings took over.¹⁸

When the ban on communism came, it was something that Danish communists expected and, in fact, they had been preparing a clandestine existence for months.¹⁹ Although it was argued that theoretically the arrests in the summer of 1941 had recourse in emergency law, the minister of justice, Eigil Thune Jacobsen, thought it wise to have parliament legalize the action, and so he had the president of the Supreme Court draft a law that made communist activities illegal. While the constitution did leave room for banning political parties that constituted a threat to public security, it was just as clear that detaining Danish citizens purely on the grounds of legal political activity was a clear breach unless the case was proven in court. This is also how it was perceived by the cabinet and

¹⁵ Houmann 1990, pp. 63–4, 68; Report by the leader of the communist youth in Denmark to Comintern 23 September 1939, in ‘*Vår Kamp vil vokse og styrkes*’. *Dokumenter til belysning af Danmarks kommunistiske Partis og Frit Danmarks virksomhed 1939–1943/44*, edited by Hans Kirchhoff and Aage Trommer (Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til Danmarks historie, 2001), pp. 56–8; Henrik S. Nissen, ‘1929–1940. Regeringen Stauning-Munch’, in Niels Finn Christiansen, Karl Christian Lammers and Henrik S. Nissen (*Danmarks historie* vol. 7, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1988), pp. 276–8; Svend Rybner, ‘Cirkelns kvadratur. DKP under besættelsen’, in Joachim Lund (ed.), *Partier under pres. Demokratiet under besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2003), pp. 229–57.

¹⁶ Joachim Lund, ‘“At opretholde sindets neutralitet” – geografen Gudmund Hatt, det ny Europa og det store verdensdrama’, in John T. Lauridsen (ed.), *Over streger – under besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2007), pp. 242–93.

¹⁷ Roslyng-Jensen 2007, pp. 153–4.

¹⁸ Kirchhoff 2001, p. 96; Roslyng-Jensen 2007, p. 161.

¹⁹ Kirchhoff 2001, pp. 110–19.

in the parliamentary coordinating committee behind the coalition government, where the issue was discussed for days before the law was finally approved.²⁰ According to the minister of justice, Renthe-Fink had hinted that Berlin was preparing to demand exactly this action, and whether this was true or not, it was decided not to wait for the Germans to raise the question officially.²¹ The communist party chairman, Aksel Larsen, sent personal letters to every MP reminding them of the fact that they had all sworn to respect the constitution; however, the law was passed in parliament on 22 August, exactly two months after Barbarossa. If the executive branch had carried out the arrests during the summer, this time the legislature was responsible for violating constitutional rights, and no one had to refer to emergency measures.²² There were no objections to the law in parliament – the communists' seats being empty – and the only statement came from a leading conservative, Ole Bjørn Kraft, who seized the opportunity to condemn communism and rejoice in the fact that the Soviet agents in Denmark had finally been subjugated: 'There is no fertile soil for such weed in the Danish garden.'²³ The conservative press likewise advocated a ban on communism, 'this illegal, insidious epidemic in society's body', which constituted 'an alien element, which a healthy society is obliged to isolate and neutralize'. Little wonder that Danish communists regarded German demands and wishes as a long sought-after excuse for their opponents to finally dissolve the party.

In the newspapers, the government's anti-communist measures enjoyed widespread support and hardly anyone expressed concern about the fact that Danish police were now holding a large number of citizens in breach of the constitution. 'Of course it is problematic, but it is necessary to step up firmly against communism', stated a leading member of the liberal *Vénstre* party, and the editorials of every leading newspaper in the country followed suit. The Social Democrat daily declared that the communists would certainly not be missed, and the editorial of *Jyllands-Posten* simply ran the headline 'At last'.²⁴ Historical research has categorized the action as 'anti-communist Denmark's vendetta against an inconvenient political party';²⁵ although the above would suggest the

²⁰ Munch 1967 vol. 1, pp. 200–10.

²¹ *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, p. 340; Munch 1967 vol. 1, p. 200.

²² Koch 1994, p. 435 (summary in English).

²³ *Rigsdagstidende* 1940–41, Folketingets Forhandlinger (Copenhagen: Rigsdagen, 1941), col. 2455–57. The conservative party had attempted to persuade the parliament to ban the Communist Party in 1933 and 1939.

²⁴ Kirchhoff 2001, p. 91; Roslyng-Jensen 2007, p. 161.

²⁵ Kirchhoff 2001, p. 90. There is ample evidence of the anti-communist consensus among Danish newspapers. See Koch 1994, pp. 286–90.

situation was more complex. Approximately 240 communists were eventually held in the Horserød Camp north of Copenhagen until, in August 1943, they were warned that German police were about to take over the administration. During the night of 29 August, ninety prisoners managed to escape, while on 2 October the remaining 150 inmates were deported to the concentration camp of Stutthof near Danzig. Twenty-two of them never returned.

Danish Volunteers for the Waffen-SS

Operation Barbarossa evoked a desire for direct participation within a small percentage of the male population, which should be considered as only the latest example of a trend toward personal engagement in conflicts with heavily ideological features. In 1936–8 between 400 and 500 Danish volunteers joined the international brigades in defence of the Spanish Republic, and during the Winter War more than 1,000 Danes took part on the Finnish side. Another 1,000 volunteered for allied service during the Second World War.²⁶ The German war against the Soviet Union, however, mobilized far greater numbers. Driven by anti-communist sentiments and/or Nazi sympathies, more than 12,000 Danish male adults volunteered for the Waffen-SS during the war. Nearly 6,000 were enrolled, most of them serving in the Danish Legion – the so-called Free Corps Denmark – which was established in late June 1941. One third were killed or disappeared in Soviet POW camps. Losses were thus comparatively high, and from the German point of view, the political success of the Danish Legion was limited too, since it never attracted the public support it was supposed to.

Already in June 1941, it was clear to the government that support for Germany's war in the east had to extend beyond statements of support and token arrests. Himmler had issued a call for the establishment of 'national legions' to join the war against Bolshevism, and Denmark was expected to make a contribution. Yet even Scavenius could agree that sending Danish conscripts to the eastern front would mean forsaking any remaining pretence of neutrality, and the Danish government was not prepared to risk entering into open conflict with the British. In August the German military authorities responded to an earlier Danish request for permission to expand their number of conscripts. This could be done, the Germans informed them, if Denmark would provide a regiment for the Finnish front. Scavenius firmly rejected the idea.²⁷

²⁶ Rasmus Mariager (ed.), *Danskere i krig 1936–48* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2009).

²⁷ Munch 1967 vol. 1, p. 205; *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, p. 448; Viggo Sjøqvist, *Erik Scavenius. En biografi* vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1973), p. 162.

If neutral Denmark could not send its conscripts to war, there were other options. Gunnar Larsen made an unsuccessful attempt to establish a unit of Danish volunteers for the Finnish front. Danes had taken part in both the Finnish Civil War (1918) and the Winter War, and Larsen hoped to be able to mobilize support for Denmark's Nordic neighbour once again. Yet the plan failed to win domestic backing because the national conservatives he had hoped to mobilize refused to support a scenario in which Danish citizens would be fighting alongside the army occupying Denmark.²⁸

Larsen's idea, which was perfectly in line with the government's policy of active collaboration, was that if large numbers of Danes were about to volunteer for the war against Bolshevism, it would be better if this was organized by Danish citizens who were opposed to National Socialism in a process that could be more or less controlled by the authorities. The plan was also to provide an alternative to a competing initiative by the Danish National Socialists. On 29 June, as a result of talks between leading figures of the Danish National Socialist Party and the SS, it was announced that a unit of volunteers for the war against the Soviet Union would be established. The news first appeared in the newspaper of the Danish National Socialists and was therefore presented to the government as a *fait accompli*. Yet faced with a possible German demand for Danish armed forces for the eastern front, it proved a convenient method of pre-empting such a requirement without directly tying the government to complicity in military support for Hitler. The government subsequently allowed officers a leave of absence to enlist for service in the east. Recruiting volunteers for the German war effort was illegal in Denmark, but the practice had nevertheless taken place since the beginning of the occupation in April 1940. Indeed when the attack on the Soviet Union was launched, the *Waffen-SS* already counted a few hundred Danish volunteers, organized into the Regiment *Nordland* of the Division *Wiking*. The *Wiking* Division was heavily engaged in the invasion during the summer of 1941 and again in the Caucasian campaign of 1942.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union produced a wave of Danish volunteers, which during the subsequent three months led to an estimated 1,650 men coming forward. Thanks to ground-breaking studies from the 1990s, much is now known about the volunteers and their motivation.²⁹ Contrary to post-war conceptions about the eastern front collaborators, these men were not predominately criminals and/or

²⁸ Jan Ahtola Nielsen, 'Dansk frikorps til Finland i sommeren 1941?', *Historie* 1, 2001, 1–31.

²⁹ Christensen, Poulsen, Smith 1998, pp. 492–4 (estimates of volunteers, enrolled, and losses).

underprivileged individuals, instead they represented a broad section of the population. What did distinguish them, however, was that about 25 per cent of the volunteers belonged to the German minority in Northern Schleswig and were driven to enlist by feelings of patriotic duty. The German minority also hoped that eventual victory would entail a revision of the current border to allow them to live within the German *Reich*. In addition to the ethnic Germans, approximately half of the volunteers belonged to the Danish National Socialists, while many more supported their cause even if not members themselves. Unemployment followed by a job in Germany was another common, if indirect, path to recruitment for the Waffen-SS; it is estimated that approximately 2,500 Danish workers in Germany – some of them Nazis – enlisted in the Waffen-SS at recruitment meetings held at their workplaces.³⁰

There was, however, another set of motivations within the Danish Legion. Among army officers there was widespread anger and frustration at the Danish surrender on 9 April 1940. Blaming the government for not having taken Denmark's defence seriously during the 1930s, their loyalty to the political establishment had been shattered. In the eyes of some of those officers, the war against the Soviet Union provided an opportunity to restore the honour of the Danish armed forces. Since fighting Germany was no longer an option, and anti-Communism was an integral part of their worldview, they now turned their attention to the war in the east, a war they believed could actually be won.

To the government, which worried about compromising Danish neutrality, this group of officers and soldiers provided legitimacy for an otherwise ideologically biased project. On 29 June a conservative-nationalist artillery officer, Christian Peter Kryssing, who was an ardent anti-communist, but did not support the Nazis, was appointed commander of the Danish Legion. The first units of the legion were shipped to the SS barracks at Langenhorn north of Hamburg in July, where they were made to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler. This was expressly against what had originally been promised. The Danish Legion was supposed to operate as a Danish unit under Danish command, acting independently of the Waffen-SS. Seeing it as one of his main tasks to preserve the position of the legion as an exclusively Danish unit, Kryssing – who insisted on carrying a uniform of the Danish armed forces – would continuously have to fend off German attempts at ideologically streamlining the legion through National Socialist educational programs. This soon brought him into conflict with the *Führungshauptamt*, which saw the national legions

³⁰ Therkel Stræde, 'Deutschlandsarbeiter', in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Europa und der "Reichseinsatz"* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1991), pp. 140–71.



Figure 9.1 The first volunteers of Frikorps Danmark are arriving at the Langenhorn barracks near Hamburg. The Frikorps' first chief, Christian Peder Kryssing, is marching in the second row, second from the right (19 July 1941).

as a means to integrate the so-called 'Germanic' peoples into a future National Socialist-led, Greater Germany.

The Danish Legion was later transferred to Treskau in Poland. Here, following disputes with some of his men who adhered to Nazi ideology, Kryssing was relieved of his command in February 1942 and replaced by a hardline Danish National Socialist officer named Christian Frederik von Schalburg. Kryssing later advanced to become an SS *Brigadeführer* and the highest-ranking foreign officer in the Waffen-SS, while Schalburg was killed in action during the first engagements with the Red Army at Demyansk in June 1942.³¹ After weeks of severe fighting, the Danes were withdrawn, only to be put back into action at Velikie Luki between December 1942 and March 1943. Shortly thereafter in June 1943 the Danish Legion, along with other foreign legions, was dissolved and the Danish units incorporated in a new Division *Nordland* as 'Regiment 24 Dänemark'. In the autumn of 1943, the regiment was deployed to fight partisans in Croatia, but in December it was back on the eastern front, taking part in the defence of the Oranienbaum pocket, then at Narva, and, lastly, in the battle of Berlin. It is assumed that units of the Danish Legion took part in war crimes against civilians in both Byelorussia and Croatia, but there is very little direct evidence.³²

After the war former Danish members of the Waffen-SS were prosecuted for treason, typically receiving prison sentences of two years each. It is estimated that approximately 3,300 people were convicted.³³ Among these were seventy-seven officers who typically received harsher sentences. Kryssing was sentenced to four years of prison, while the Danish Legion's last commander, Knud Børge Martinsen, was executed in 1949 for crimes committed as a leader of the notorious Schalburg Corps in Copenhagen during the occupation.

With few exceptions Danish public opinion viewed the volunteers as traitors who should be treated as such. There was, however, no law against volunteering for military service in a foreign country. By contrast, it was illegal to bear arms against one's fatherland, and it could be argued that Danes who fought against the Red Army were in fact aiding Denmark's enemies and inhibiting the liberation of Denmark. In 1945 much had changed since the early days of the war when public opinion

³¹ Thomas Harder, *Kryssing – manden der valgte forkert* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt and Ringhof, 2014); Mikkel Kirkebæk, *Schalburg – en patriotisk landsforræder* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2008).

³² Christensen, Poulsen, Smith 1998, pp. 267–76; Therkel Stræde and Dennis Larsen, *En skole i vold. Bobruisk 1941–44* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2014).

³³ Although this number has not been verified. Ditlev Tamm, *Retsopgøret efter besættelsen* vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Jurist- og økonomforbundets forlag, 1985), pp. 274–84.

was overwhelmingly hostile towards ‘the Russians’. It was a challenge for prosecutors to argue against the government’s public support for the German war against Bolshevism in June 1941 as well as its approval of the Danish Legion and German recruitment. The problem was overcome by a retrospective law, making it a criminal offence to have seen active service in the Waffen-SS. Convicted former volunteers later claimed that they had enjoyed the support of the government and that they had been stabbed in the back. To many of them, the Cold War was proof that they had been right in the first place to fight the communists.³⁴

The ‘Eastern Committee’: When War Means Business

The German invasion of the Soviet Union opened up new opportunities for Danish business enterprise.³⁵ Until the First World War Russia had been Danish industry’s most important foreign field of expansion, but the nationalization of foreign assets in the aftermath of the Russian revolution ended nearly all association. More recently, the Baltic countries, which were of particular interest to Danish companies, had only been out of economic reach since the Soviet occupation and annexations in 1940. After 22 June 1941, Danish business leaders immediately began discussions about how to regain control of these formerly Danish-owned plants and re-establish a presence, especially within the Baltic territories. The owner and manager of the cement machine corporation F.L. Smidth & Co., Gunnar Larsen, had been appointed minister of public works in the summer of 1940, but he was still first and foremost a business leader. Just two days after the launch of Operation Barbarossa, he and a Social Democratic member of parliament, discussed the ‘reopening’ of Russia. They agreed that the expected economic development in Russia would create such a boom in Europe that unemployment would disappear for the next twenty-five years. Larsen’s Swedish connections were likewise beginning to consider the business opportunities in Russia and the Baltic areas. Indeed, in Sweden in general, public sentiment had apparently become much more favourable towards Germany following the attack on the Soviet Union.³⁶

³⁴ For an evaluation of the so-called apocryphal narratives, see Claus Bryld and Anette Warring, *Besættelsestiden som kollektiv erindring* (Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1998), pp. 111–22.

³⁵ This section is based on Joachim Lund, *Hitlers spisekammer. Danmark og den europæiske nyordning 1940–43* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2005), pp. 144–269, and Joachim Lund, ‘Building Hitler’s Europe: Forced Labor in the Danish Construction Business during World War II’, *Business History Review* vol. 84/3, 2010, 479–99.

³⁶ *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, pp. 287, 321 (conversations with Bollerup Madsen and Kylberg, 24 June and 15 July).

Discussions and considerations continued throughout the summer. The manager of the Aarhus Vegetable Oil Mill, Thorkild Juncker, a business partner of Larsen's, had returned from Berlin at the beginning of June with strong suspicions of an imminent war in the east.³⁷ Juncker had had conversations with IG Farben regarding a collaboration scheme on the future growing of oil seeds in the Ukraine. Another close acquaintance of Juncker, Niels Erik Wilhelmsen, suggested a plan to establish a Danish-Baltic company with concessions on forestry, agriculture and mining. Larsen, for his part, did not miss the opportunity to point out to Renthe-Fink, the German envoy, that the F.L. Smidth Corporation had lost a major cement plant at Port Kunda in Estonia to Soviet nationalization in 1940. Renthe-Fink responded by suggesting that the Danes put together a list of lost assets in the occupied eastern territories so that things could be put in order.³⁸

On 11 September 1941, Denmark's new envoy to Berlin Otto Carl Mohr presented his credentials to Hitler. On this occasion, the German dictator spoke enthusiastically about the future prospects of *Lebensraum* in the east. The new Europe, he told Mohr, would prosper if Russia's resources were managed correctly. Western Russia's soil would yield twice as much as it had done before the war and European emigration would now be directed towards the east.³⁹

Hitler's remarks provided what would later become the excuse of Scavenius and Gunnar Larsen to open their dealings in the east. As we have seen, preparations for exploiting business opportunities in the east were, in fact, already in motion when Mohr met Hitler. A month later, Karl Megerle, an editor at the *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*, spoke at a meeting of the Danish-German Association and emphasized 'the immense consequences of the victory in Russia'. What had so far been organized against Europe would now be organized for Europe's reconstruction in order to secure its existence. Germany, Megerle stated, would take on this huge task, but she expected her neighbours to do their part.⁴⁰ Immediately after the meeting, Renthe-Fink and Larsen agreed to set up a committee to show Berlin that the Danes meant business. Visiting Copenhagen a few days later, the Gauleiter of Schleswig-Holstein, Hinrich Lohse, who had just been appointed *Reichskommissar* of the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (a Nazi administrative region covering the Baltic States and most

³⁷ In Germany there were widespread rumours and suspicions to this end. See e.g. Ulrich von Hassell, *Vom ändern Deutschland* (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1946), pp. 185, 201–2, 211–12.

³⁸ Lund 2005, pp. 144–7.

³⁹ Sjøqvist 1973, vol. 2, p. 164.

⁴⁰ Alkil 1945–46, pp. 830–1.

of Byelorussia), strongly supported the idea of Danish economic activity in the east. Accordingly, he invited Larsen to visit him in Riga.

During October Larsen put together a private committee with Juncker as chairman and Niels Erik Wilhelmsen as secretary. Other members included the landowning magnate Folmer Lüttichau, the industrialist J.C. Hempel, the manager of the construction firm Højgaard & Schultz, Knud Højgaard, and a close confidant of Larsen's named Knud Sthyr. These men shared vested interests in the east with Juncker's vegetable oil business, for example, laying claim to a plant in the Latvian town of Liepaja. In addition to the clear economic incentive, the committee's purpose served to strengthen Danish goodwill in Berlin, which soon had a very tangible effect. On 6 November, the Danish envoy to Berlin informed the German Foreign Office that a committee had been established in Copenhagen in order to offer assistance in the rebuilding of the eastern territories – the *Ostraum* – and a few days later, Hitler enthusiastically told his audience that conversations with the Danes had had a wonderful effect. 'They have immediately established a company to join us in the East. In this way we are securing Europe's existence.'⁴¹ Three weeks later the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, in his ceremonial speech at the signing of the renewed Anti-Comintern Pact, took credit for the opening of Russia's economic resources to 'the whole of Europe'.⁴² On the following day, when Hitler received Scavenius, the dictator spoke again of the mobilization and opening up of Eastern Europe, European autarchy and the fight against Bolshevism. In all of these Hitler expressed his pleasure at Denmark's support.⁴³

Indeed there was much for the Germans to be satisfied with. No pressure had been applied and no demand made. Larsen, who formally stayed clear of the committee since it was initially a private one, kept in close contact with the German authorities. But therein lay the problem. In the drive for quick results, Larsen circumvented the German foreign ministry and accepted an invitation to a meeting, set up by Dr Hans Draeger of the *Nordische Verbindungsstelle* (the Nordic Liaison Office of Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry), with Alfred Rosenberg, the Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories. Rosenberg thought the Danish initiative was an excellent idea and hurried to invite Larsen to inspect

⁴¹ Werner Jochmann, *Adolf Hitler: Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–44* (Hamburg: Albrecht Knaus Verlag, 1980), p. 138.

⁴² Gerd R. Ueberschär, 'Kriegführung und Politik in Nordeuropa', in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), p. 870.

⁴³ Andreas Hillgruber (ed.), *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler. Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen 1939–1941* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1967), pp. 325–30.

the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. However, already on 5 November 1941 Hitler had instructed the Foreign Office to co-ordinate Germany's allies' economic activities in the east. Two months later, Rosenberg's ministry insisted that deliveries from European partners to the east could never become part of the ordinary trade agreements (which were conducted by the Foreign Office). Should the foreign ministry assume this responsibility, the *Ostministerium* would completely disengage itself from the matter.⁴⁴ It would take almost a year of wrangling for the Foreign Office to effectively put an end to Rosenberg's dealings with the Danes. In another example of the competing administrative complexity over exploiting the eastern territories, at an inter-ministerial conference in November 1941, Hermann Göring's Four Year Plan likewise laid claim to the right to co-ordinate the efforts of Germany's allies in the economic 'reconstruction' of the east.⁴⁵ Without knowing it, Larsen and his 'Working Committee for the Promotion of Danish Initiative in Eastern and South Eastern Europe' had landed in the notorious rivalries so typical of the polycentric Führer state.

Another problem was, obviously, the war itself. At their first meeting, on 11 December 1941, committee members voiced their high expectations about this 'new Danish road eastwards'. The Danish initiative in Russia before 1914 had been extremely important, and 'one was now facing the realization of a dream that had been kept alive despite 20 years of intervening developments in Russia'.⁴⁶ Yet this was also the day that Hitler declared war on the United States, providing Roosevelt with a welcome opportunity to engage in the European theatre. At the same time, German operations had come to a standstill all along the eastern front, and the outcome of the war would remain unclear for the next fourteen months. In February 1942 the Danish project suffered a further blow with the death of the German armaments minister, Fritz Todt, in a plane crash. Todt had been Larsen's closest partner in Berlin – the two of them had closed a deal concerning a traffic corridor between Copenhagen and

⁴⁴ Aktennotiz (von Harder) betr. Einschaltung der Wirtschaft der europäischen Länder. Sitzung im Ostministerium 21. Jan. 1942. Bundesarchiv R6/443 (dat. 29 January 1942).

⁴⁵ "Das uns nahestehende Europa muss mithelfen." Vermerk über die Beteiligung des Auslandes an der wirtschaftlichen Erschliessung des Ostraumes (Vierjahresplan; no date), Bundesarchiv R6/23; Denkschrift über den gegenwärtigen Stand der Vorbereitungen zur Heranziehung der europäischen Staaten zur wirtschaftlichen Erschliessung der besetzten russischen Gebiete (23 November 1941), Politisches Archiv/Auswärtiges Amt, Büro Unterstaatssekretär, Russland I; Ueberschär 1983, pp. 864–5; 871–3; Hans Umbreit, 'Auf dem Weg zur Kontinentalherrschaft', *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* vol. 5/1 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1988), p. 247.

⁴⁶ Protocol of the committee meeting 11 December 1941, Archive of the Eastern Committee. Danish National Archives, Udenrigsministeriet 1909–45, 3.E.136.

Hamburg – and one of his last deeds was to help restore Danish ownership to the Port Kunda cement plant in Estonia. Larsen attended Todt's funeral, and during the following weeks he and Juncker carried on negotiations concerning lost assets, investments, and the export of machinery. Between 18 April and 2 May, Larsen and Juncker travelled through the Baltic States, escorted by representatives of Rosenberg's ministry, visiting Gauleiter Lohse in Riga as well as the Danish cement plant at Port Kunda. The factory was categorized as *Kriegswichtig* (important for war), which is why in October 1943, as labour deficiencies threatened to halt production, more than 200 Jewish forced labourers were put to work at the plant, guarded by Estonian SS men. In this way the factory was able to continue operating, managed by a handful of engineers from Larsen F.L. Smith corporation, until the Germans took over in the spring of 1944.⁴⁷

Larsen and Juncker's journey to the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* in 1942 also proved the culmination of the project. Upon the delegation's return, Larsen at a government meeting announced his intention to make the committee official and place it under the auspices of the Danish Foreign Ministry. This provoked an immediate outcry among his opponents in the cabinet, who had allegedly never heard of the initiative. Larsen was accused of conducting his own secretive foreign policy and of pursuing private, economic goals. It took a vigorous intervention by Prime Minister Vilhelm Buhl to calm things down and persuade his ministers to accept the arrangement. From that point on, the committee's official name was 'the Eastern Space Committee of the Foreign Ministry'. Its room for manoeuvre, however, was becoming more and more limited, and a few days later, *Gesandter* Karl Schnurre appeared in Copenhagen to see to it that the committee's work was channelled into the realm of the German Foreign Office. The Eastern committee was now assigned to Denmark's trade commission and was deprived of any initiative. On 28 July Hitler confirmed that negotiations with foreign countries concerning their engagement in the occupied eastern territories would be handled by the Foreign Office. Rosenberg had lost the Berlin *Papierkrieg* (paper war) and in Copenhagen Larsen complained in his diary that he was tired of being dragged into the fights between the German bigwigs.⁴⁸

The Eastern Committee had lost momentum. Negotiations in Berlin in the autumn of 1942 led nowhere, but it was not until September 1943 that the committee was finally dissolved. During this time the committee had to oversee, among other things, the ongoing and less than half-hearted Danish attempts to accommodate German wishes for Danish farmers to

⁴⁷ Lund 2010.

⁴⁸ Lund 2005, pp. 178–206; *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 2, 2015, p. 270.

settle in the east. Since August 1941 Hitler, Himmler and Rosenberg had repeatedly spoken about the need to include other 'Germanic' peoples in the eastern settlement program. In fact already at the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler had instructed Herbert Backe of the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture to procure Dutch and Danish farmers to take over Soviet collective farms.⁴⁹ The Danish government was informed on 2 July 1941 and the proposal was then referred to the Association of Danish Farmers (*Landbrugsraadet*) and the State Office for Emigration (*Statens Udvandringskontor*). There was even an official announcement in the newspapers. Yet again the project was lost in German bureaucracy and thrown backwards and forwards between the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Eastern Ministry and the SS. In total, 170 Danes applied for permission to travel to the east; farmers, engineers, businessmen, farm bailiffs, among others. Only a handful actually went; these were mostly people working at Port Kunda and for other Danish firms in the Baltic or the Polish 'General Government'.⁵⁰

Signing the Anti-Comintern Pact

When Denmark was asked to sign the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1941 the country's neutrality was put to the test once more.⁵¹ This was not an endeavour the Danish government wished to participate in, but with the Wehrmacht losing momentum before Moscow, the Nazi regime wanted to make a strong statement of anti-communist solidarity. The pact, originally an agreement between Germany and Japan dating from 1936 and later signed by Italy, was now up for renewal. In addition to Denmark a host of other states were invited to join, including Finland, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Japan, Manchukuo and Nanking-China.

The signing ceremony was supposed to take place on 25 November, but the Danes had only been approached five days in advance, which hardly left much time for discussion within the Danish government. This

⁴⁹ Uwe Mai's claim that the inclusion of other 'Germanic' settlers from 1942 signified 'an entirely new clientele' and 'a radical escalation of settlement planning', is not accurate. Uwe Mai, "Rasse und Raum". *Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), pp. 312–13.

⁵⁰ Lund 2005, pp. 252–69. The Dutch eastern settlement scheme, which was organized by the *Nederlandse Oostcompagnie*, fared better; see David Barnouw, *Oostboeren, zee-Germanen en turfstekers* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004).

⁵¹ Munch 1967 vol. 1, 1967, pp. 230–60; *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, pp. 442–77; Sjøqvist 1973, vol. 2, pp. 168–89; Kirchhoff 2001, pp. 98–109; Bo Lidegaard, *Overleveren 1914–1945*. *Dansk udenrigspolitisk historie* vol. 4 (Copenhagen: Danmarks nationalleksikon, 2003), pp. 474–83.

may have been the whole point, although sources suggest that Berlin had wanted to secure Finland's assent before approaching Copenhagen.⁵² In the event the Danish government refused on the grounds that its signature would mean giving up any claim to neutrality and expose the country to British military action. Renthe-Fink, however, made it clear to Scavenius that Berlin would not accept a Danish refusal. The next day, 21 November, he applied further pressure, demanding confirmation before midnight that Denmark would participate. Renthe-Fink then delivered an *aide-mémoire*, which stated that the German government expected Denmark to sign, while ominously warning of the consequences for non-compliance; 'if Denmark by refusing the agreement should exclude itself from European co-operation and – such is the opinion of the government of the *Reich* – place itself in the camp of the Bolsheviks and their friends.'⁵³

Under the circumstances Scavenius recommended signing, stating that Danish opposition would be meaningless, since Berlin was apparently prepared to use force to have their way. As far as the British were concerned, the foreign minister argued, they had no interest in escalating a potential conflict and pushing Copenhagen further into the German camp. Scavenius was followed by Larsen and the senior civil servants in the Foreign Ministry as well as Mohr, the Danish envoy to Berlin. But opposition within the government was vigorous, and the situation began to look like the 'hidden government crisis' in July. Again, there were strong feelings that signing the treaty would mean a decisive step away from neutrality and signify support for Germany. The fear was that Denmark was slowly being dragged into the war on Germany's side. Scavenius rejected this view, stating that the British understood Denmark's situation and that the consequences of refusing were far more serious. Seeking a compromise solution, Larsen won support for his idea of a supplementary protocol of four points which confirmed Denmark's status as a non-belligerent state and clearly limited actions against communism to police co-operation within Danish borders. This way, Larsen insisted, signing the pact would not threaten the status quo.⁵⁴

Renthe-Fink accepted the protocols, but the various coalition parties within the Danish government still had to secure the approval of their MPs, and at this point Ribbentrop lost patience. Late on 22 November, he telephoned Renthe-Fink, telling him to inform the Danish government that he would no longer put up with 'parliamentary excuses' and

⁵² Munch 1967, vol. 1, pp. 253, 258.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 243; *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, pp. 451–2.

⁵⁴ *Samarbejdets mand* vol. 1, 2015, p. 445.

that he was prepared to cancel the occupation arrangements should Denmark refuse to comply. Ribbentrop's message was as unambiguous as it was uncompromising, but in fact Prime Minister Stauning and the cabinet had already capitulated. No one in the government dared to face the consequences of refusal, and everybody was adamant about preserving a politically united government. Repeating a weighty argument from the communist law negotiations in August, it was stressed that if there was to be a break with Berlin, it would have to be on an issue everybody agreed on and one the Danish population would understand. A week later, Stauning explained his position to a friend: 'Do you really think I like being lined up on that team? But it would be fairy tale politics to say 'no'. The contents of the treaty do not justify it. It is what the Germans would call a scrap of paper.'⁵⁵ Opposition to the fight against communism did not justify a break with Berlin to anyone. 'We naturally support the fight against communism', wrote the leadership of the Conservative Party to its local branches before continuing that Danes would find it odd if the government chose to neglect countermeasures against the Comintern. The central concern was Danish neutrality, not the fight against communism. Indeed when Stauning was confronted over the issue he tellingly replied: 'Communism? I've been fighting it for 20 years.'⁵⁶

Although Stauning's government was united in its conviction not to risk the special relationship with Berlin, the attachment of the supplementary protocols remained acceptable to the Germans so long as Danish compliance was immediate. Yet en route to Berlin, Scavenius learned that the German Foreign Office demanded that the one protocol explicitly referring to police actions against communism be omitted. This would obviously suggest that other measures, including military options, could also be applied. Scavenius, however, stood his ground, which made Ribbentrop furious, but eventually led to a compromise over the wording. Instead of a direct reference to the police the protocol only talked about ensuring 'public security', which, in Denmark, was the responsibility of the police.⁵⁷

Scavenius signed the Anti-Comintern Pact at the ceremony in Berlin on 25 November 1941. What looked like the most serious threat to Danish neutrality since the German occupation had been turned to Denmark's advantage by getting Berlin to accept a declaration that asserted Danish independence. However it all soon proved a hollow victory. In order not

⁵⁵ Koch 1994, p. 305.

⁵⁶ Kirchhoff 2001, pp. 101–2.

⁵⁷ Sjøqvist 1973, vol. 2, pp. 174–9.

to water down the propaganda effect of the renewed treaty, Ribbentrop had demanded that the supplementary protocols not be made public. The consequences of this were ambiguous. To parts of the Danish media anti-Communism still outweighed concerns about neutrality. *Vestkysten*, a leading liberal provincial newspaper, wrote that 'Communism is contrary to Danish minds and ways of thinking. Politically, the people of this country have already sent communism packing ... The fact that Denmark has now joined the Anti-Comintern Pact is in itself a denouncement of the methods which form part of communism.'⁵⁸ Other parts of the Danish public, however, which had become very apprehensive about signing any treaty with Germany concerning their war effort, felt that their worst suspicions about Scavenius had been confirmed. Instead of reassuring the population that the ruling elite shared the public's concerns, Copenhagen saw the first mass demonstrations against the government's policy of co-operation, as hundreds of people, mostly students, turned out in the streets to protest. The crowd denounced Scavenius as a traitor, but were met with police violence and arrests.⁵⁹ In spite of the crackdown domestic opposition within Denmark grew, which illustrated the high price of accommodating Nazi Germany.

Concluding Remarks

Denmark's response to Germany's war against the Soviet Union was a constant state of vacillation over where exactly to draw the line between the desire to preserve their neutrality, on the one hand, and the need to fulfil Berlin's demands and wishes on the other. In 1941–2 there was widespread Danish support for the war against Bolshevism, but the government knew very well that Berlin was manipulating such sentiment for its own purposes and constantly sought to maintain its distance. Denmark's future as a sovereign state was dependent on an Allied victory, so Denmark walked a precarious tightrope between benign compliance and active collaboration. The government utilized German demands to pursue internal goals (the persecution of Danish communists), it accommodated German expectations (the declaration in support of the war against the Soviet Union) and it watered down German demands (allowing for the establishment of a Danish legion of volunteers for the eastern front in lieu of regulars from the Danish army; securing the supplementary protocols to ameliorate the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact). Moreover, the Danish government supported a limited private initiative

⁵⁸ Christensen et al., 2015, p. 257.

⁵⁹ Kirchhoff 2001, pp. 103–9; Roslyng-Jensen 2007, pp. 163–7.

(the Eastern Space Committee) in order to secure lucrative ventures in the east as well as ensure Berlin's goodwill.

Clearly there was much on the surface that suggested Danish complicity, but in practice the government worked at every step to limit its compliance and Denmark could hardly be said to have formed a willing member of the German-led alliance against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it sufficed to keep Berlin satisfied and when Hitler had been defeated, a narrative could be presented to the public and the international community according to which the Danish government had acted entirely under duress. Laws would be passed which saw to it that the volunteers for the Waffen-SS were duly punished, while the communist party regained its legal status. In spite of not being recognized as an allied nation, in 1945 Denmark was at least invited to join the San Francisco Conference which resulted in the creation of the United Nations Charter. It would seem that Denmark's flexible and pragmatic policy in 1941 had successfully negotiated walking the tightrope between the warring factions.

10 Belgium

Nico Wouters

About 25,000 Belgians actively served on the eastern front under German command during the Second World War,¹ as members of armed units and the Waffen-SS, but also as workers or drivers in the *Organisation Todt*, the National Socialist Motor Corps (*Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps* – NSKK) and the German Red Cross (about 600 Flemish women served as nurses).² The first foreign SS unit in occupied Europe to reach its full strength was the Walloon *SS-Sturmbrigade* led by the Francophone Belgian collaborator Léon Degrelle.³ What makes the Belgian case even more interesting is the fact that it is really two cases in one; that of the French-speaking Wallonians (from southern Belgium) and the Dutch-speaking Flemings (in the north of Belgium).

Interwar Years

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail anti-communism in Belgian society during the interwar years. Suffice to say when the neutral country of Belgium opened diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1935 this did little to diminish strong anti-communist sentiments amongst traditional Belgian elites, notably the Church and the military. The Belgian communist party remained fairly small with only nine seats (out of 202) in the national parliament of 1939.

Belgian's most important future collaborationist parties played the anti-Communist card more actively after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The most important of these parties in francophone

¹ The author would like to thank Koen Aerts, Eddy De Bruyne and Bruno De Wever for their comments.

² Bruno De Wever, 'Military collaboration in Belgium' in Wolfgang Benz, Johannes Houwink ten Cate and Gerhard Otto (eds.), *Die Bürokratie der Okkupation. Strukturen der Herrschaft und Verwaltung im besetzten Europa* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 153–72; Frank Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde en Wolchow: Vlaanderen en het Oostfront* (Antwerpen, 2002), pp. 88 and 125.

³ Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 88.

Belgium was Rex.⁴ Originally created as an integrist Catholic propaganda movement, its ambitious leader Léon Degrelle turned it into his own political party after the summer of 1935. When Rex participated in the parliamentary elections of May 1936, the party contained an amalgam of right-wing malcontents; intellectuals, but also embittered veterans and members of the impoverished lower middle class. Radical anticommunism was certainly an important common element. Partly thanks to the youthful charisma of Degrelle, Rex gained 11.5 per cent of the votes (21 seats in parliament), mainly in Wallonia and Brussels (18.1 per cent). Rex appealed to diverse groups, but the strongest was the urban lower class bourgeoisie. Degrelle quickly overplayed his hand when he lost a snap election he himself had provoked in 1937. After this, the party slowly crumbled. By 1940 Rex had become a marginal and ostracized group. At its peak it had appealed to different Francophone conservatives; integrist Catholics, right-wing intellectuals, the military and Belgian royalists.

The Flemish National Union (*Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* or VNV), Rex's most important Flemish counterpart, was quite different. Deeply embedded in the nineteenth-century Flemish movement, and post-1918 anti-Belgian Flemish nationalism, the party was built upon one of the most durable cleavages in Belgian society. Its main political action was directed against the 'Francophone' Belgian state. Another key difference with Rex was the VNV's social and political position on the eve of the Second World War. The Flemish nationalist party was strongly organized, down to a network of local sections in most Flemish regions. During the municipal elections of 1938 the party formed coalitions with the Catholic party in hundreds of Flemish towns. In the parliamentary elections of April 1939 the party retained 15 per cent of the vote and about 30,000 members (with, at its peak in 1941, 50,000 members). Accordingly, the VNV was anything but ostracized.

The VNV repeatedly distanced itself from the German Nazi regime, but in reality its anti-Belgian Flemish nationalism increasingly merged with fascistic ideas. In fact the party had received secret funding from the German propaganda ministry since 1937. While German National Socialism was a model of inspiration for the radical wing of the VNV, in a general sense the ideological inspiration for the French-speaking right-wing circles in and around Rex was more Italian fascism. Finally, it should also be noted that the VNV had a strong pacifist tradition, resulting from the First World War. During the 1930s, however, this pacifism

⁴ Martin Conway, *Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement 1940–1944* (London/Yale, 1993).

became a building block of the dominant anti-Belgian narrative ('no Flemish blood for Belgium'), while the VNV's support for Belgian neutrality was mainly a tool to obstruct French-Belgian cooperation.⁵

Disappointed Collaborationists and the Power Struggles of 1940

Belgium surrendered to Germany on 28 May 1940 after eighteen days of fighting. The country received a German military regime (a *Militärverwaltung*), which lacked a mandate to promote an overtly National Socialist political programme. Occupied Belgium retained an administrative framework consisting of the top-ranking Belgian civil servants. Within the structure of the military occupation regime the SS had no formal foothold. Unlike in the Netherlands, Belgium had no *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* (HSSPF) and the country was under the authority of the German military high command.

Yet as was often the case with National Socialist occupation regimes, the nominal authorities as well as the official policies in Belgium did not always reflect the reality on the ground. In fact Nazi political programs were purposely advanced and the SS ensured they were not excluded from the country. Hitler immediately approved a *Flamenpolitik* ('policy for Flemings') which favoured the treatment of the Germanic Flemish people over the non-Germanic Wallonians.⁶ Even more importantly, Himmler's Reich Main Security Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) immediately launched a power struggle with the occupying military regime. On 27 May 1940 – a day before the Belgian capitulation – a pre-emptive Himmler established the *SS-Verfügungstruppe Standarte Westland* to recruit Flemish and Dutch SS volunteers. On 27 July 1940 representatives of Himmler's Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) established themselves in Brussels, quickly followed by offices in Antwerp, Ghent, Charleroi, Liège, Dinant and Lille (northern France).⁷ Thus in reality the presence of the SS created a hybrid occupation regime from the outset.⁸

Gottlob Berger was appointed head of the new SS recruitment agency and opened the first office for Belgium in Antwerp during the summer of 1940.⁹ Berger needed the help of local Belgian National Socialists to

⁵ Bruno De Wever, 'Belgium' in R.J.B. Bosworth (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 470–88.

⁶ De Wever, *Belgium*.

⁷ The French departments Nord and Pas-de-Calais fell under the administrative authority of the German military occupation regime in Belgium.

⁸ Nico Wouters, *Mayoral Collaboration under Nazi Occupation Belgium, the Netherlands and France (1938–46)* (Basingstoke, UK/New York, 2016).

⁹ At that point only the Waffen-SS had the right to recruit non-Germans.

reach potential recruits. Although neither Rex nor the VNV were fully fledged National Socialist parties when the Germans invaded, both parties assimilated National Socialism over the course of a few months. The VNV and Rex quickly moved towards an unconditional and total adherence to the new occupying regime. As the VNV leader, Staf De Clercq, acknowledged in a speech on 10 November 1940, the organization had to temporarily accept that they had to abandon their nationalist goals. For now, the party had to consolidate its position in order to acquire totalitarian power after the end of the war. It was a position which, for the time being, evoked no protest from within the VNV rank-and-file membership.

While anti-Belgian collaboration did not contradict the nationalist core of the VNV, Rex had no such anti-Belgian tradition. Support for the German occupation was also more difficult to sell in the Francophone part of Belgium. Degrelle would announce his total support for the occupation regime (and Hitler in person) on 1 January 1941, but only after he was forced to admit that any compromise with the existing francophone elites of Belgium was impossible. His announcement caused an internal crisis within Rex and many left the party.

All in all, the first months of occupation were quite a disappointment for both Rex and the VNV. Both parties had to discover that the new German rulers were not interested in giving them any real power. The German military pursued a pragmatic policy of cooperation with the existing Belgian establishment, which basically meant that Rex and the VNV had to vie for German support by proving their worth. The Flemish VNV would be remarkably successful in doing this. They had, of course, the advantage of the abovementioned *Flamenpolitik*, but the organization of the party itself was also essential. The VNV presented itself at an early phase of the occupation as a credible administrative alternative. Degrelle frantically worked to do the same with Rex, but it was an uphill battle. He led a marginalized and even partly fragmented movement in 1940. Although we lack an exact overview of Rex's membership, the social composition of the party between 1938 and 1942 was very fluid. After 1937 and again in 1940–1, many traditional Rexists left the party to be replaced by new men who joined for reasons that are not always entirely clear.

As the two parties competed with one another for the favour of the Germans, they were soon confronted with another problem. New Belgian collaborationist movements quickly emerged, presenting themselves as more radical 'Greater-Germanic' alternatives to the 'traditional' VNV and Rex. In Flanders, the most important were *De Algemene SS Vlaanderen* (later *De Germaanse SS Vlaanderen*, basically the Flemish SS) led by the Antwerp lawyer René Lagrou and *De Vlaamsch-Duitsche*

Arbeidsgemeenschap (DeVlag) led by Jef Van de Wiele. The Flemish SS would remain marginal in terms of membership (in November 1940 it had a maximum of 1,000 members),¹⁰ but it is essential because of the strategic support it received from Himmler (the same applied for DeVlag). In Francophone Belgium there was a variety of groups such as *Les Amis du Grand Reich Allemand* (AGRA), the *Deutsche Sprachverein* (DSV), the *Communauté Culturelle Wallonne* (CCW) and the *Mouvement National Populaire Wallon* (MNPW).

All these radical Greater-Germanic groups were without exception marginal movements with little real social impact. However, their real purpose was to create a permanent dynamic of radicalizing competition amongst collaborating parties. The German occupation authorities could therefore use both the carrot as well as the stick towards the VNV and Rex. This was the general political context in which eastern front recruitment became a factor.

Armed Collaboration in 1940 as a Precursor to Deployment on the Eastern Front

Before the occupation the VNV and Rex did not have strong paramilitary traditions. The occupation changed this overnight. Militias became essential strategic political assets and both parties were pulled into a competitive 'militia race'.

It is important to understand that the VNV and Rex made decisions within the logic of a domestic seizure of power and, to this end, the development of paramilitary units for use within Belgium was the priority. Yet there would be a significant overlap in membership between these first domestic paramilitary units and the first eastern front units. This was particularly clear for the Rexist *Formations de Combat*, a militia created on 9 July 1940 and having approximately 4,000 members by the end of 1940. We therefore have to take into account that the largest group of volunteers on the eastern front in 1941 came from a domestic militia, whose members had initially joined with a view to deployment in Belgium, as an embryonic future Belgian police force and/or army.

In Flanders, the competitive militia race began early. In September 1940 the Flemish SS launched its recruitment drive for volunteers to serve in the Waffen-SS. Lagrou's first call led to 450 applications, but because of the initially strict SS selection criteria only forty-five of these men would depart on 27 September 1940 for training in Munich. This

¹⁰ Bart Crombez, 'De Algemene SS-Vlaanderen' in *Cahiers-Bijdragen* (Vol. 17, 1995), pp. 165–202.

negligible quantity of men was not a major concern for Berger at that point, as his real motivation for raising a contingent of Flemish SS was to undermine the authority of the military occupation regime. Lagrou, however, kept up the pressure and in the months after September 1940 several smaller groups of men would gradually be sent to join their comrades in Munich. This small group of Flemish SS men was integrated into the *Westland* Regiment, which together with *Nordland* and *Germania*, formed the 5th SS Panzer Division *Wiking*. The VNV had only wanted to recruit if the Flemish SS remained under VNV control, but Berger had no intention of allowing this to happen¹¹ and a formal agreement between the VNV and the Flemish SS, dating from March 1941, remained a dead letter.¹²

Nazi racial ideology did not make things easy for Degrelle as the Wallonians remained non-eligible for SS recruitment. In February 1941 Rex (and AGRA) started a recruitment campaign for the NSKK in French-speaking Belgium, while the VNV commenced theirs throughout Flanders in March 1941. Degrelle promised 1,000 men, but only 300 men registered.

On 3 April 1941 Himmler created another formation known as the *Freiwilligen Standarte Nordwest* for Flemish and Dutch volunteers.¹³ Flemings were to form the 1st, 6th and 8th (infantry) companies. On 20 April 1941 De Clercq reluctantly acquiesced and agreed that the VNV would recruit for *Nordwest*. His reasoning remained strictly political. The influential VNV director of propaganda, Reimond Tollenaere, now turned his attention to this recruitment campaign. He personally stressed that volunteers would not be deployed to any military front, unless they explicitly chose to go. This (false) promise was not printed on the registration document.

Historian Frank Seberechts labelled this first VNV recruitment drive 'a failure', brought about by distrust among VNV members of the Germanic and anti-Catholic ideology of the SS.¹⁴ This failure, however, is relative. Until June 1941 between 500 and 800 Flemings enlisted for service in the SS units *Westland* and *Nordwest* from a total

¹¹ The VNV did manage to absorb the last remnants of Verdinaso and Rex-Vlaanderen in May 1941, but it could not neutralize the Flemish SS.

¹² The VNV took charge of the political leadership in Flanders, while the *Algemene SS Vlaanderen* became responsible for ideological schooling and paramilitary training. The agreement, however, never worked. Likewise, De Clercq's repeated propositions to create a Flemish military unit for coastal or aerial protection was also vetoed by the Germans.

¹³ Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

of approximately 2,000 Western European volunteers. In an international context the Flemish recruitment was therefore fairly successful. Kristof Carrein explains this (relatively) high number by pointing to the recruitment campaign by the VNV in labour camps in the north of France between March and the summer of 1941.¹⁵ At that time the Flemings working in these camps were all voluntary labourers fleeing unemployment in Belgium (forced labour would only be implemented in March 1942).

The Flemish and Walloon Legions: A Brief History

The VNV leadership and Degrelle both saw the new situation after the German invasion of the Soviet Union as a political opportunity to increase the importance of their movements and eliminate political competition.

A national Belgian legion, or a united Flemish-Walloon recruitment campaign, was out of the question. Separate Flemish and Walloon legions were therefore inevitable, also because one essential distinction remained for the time being: the Walloons were still not considered racially Germanic enough to fit the SS-criteria. They would therefore, by necessity, have to form part of the *Wehrmacht*.

Upon his return from France at the end of June 1941 Degrelle discovered that his leader of the *Formations de Combat*, Fernand Rouleau, a newcomer in Rex and an ambitious former member of the Belgian military, had initiated a major new recruitment drive.¹⁶ Rouleau had excellent connections with the Germans as well as Belgian extreme right-wing groups. It was Rouleau rather than Degrelle who received the initial permission of the Germans to create the so-called 'Belgian Legion' to counteract the Flemish national one. Degrelle, however, felt that his position was being undermined by Rouleau and that he needed to assert his authority in order not to let himself be eclipsed by this upstart.¹⁷ Not that there were many options left for him with a party in crisis and lacking any substantial German support. Degrelle now launched himself into action with his usual zeal and gusto. He launched 'his' recruitment campaign for a Walloon Legion on 8 July 1941. This campaign was in fact very broad, in principle aimed at all layers of the population, including

¹⁵ Kristof Carrein, 'De Vlaamse Oostfronters. Sociaal profiel en wervingsverloop, november 1941–augustus 1944', in *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, 1999-6, pp. 107–149 (116).

¹⁶ Eddy De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent à l'est: la Légion Wallonie et Léon Degrelle sur le front russe, 1941–1945* (Brussels, 1991) pp. 23–4, 29–30 and 35–8.

¹⁷ Francis Balace, 'Légion Wallonie', in P. Aron and J. Gotovitch (eds.), *Dictionnaire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Belgique* (Brussels, 2008), pp. 243–5.

former communist circles as well as the Belgian military.¹⁸ The campaign was explicitly cast in a Belgian national framework and, importantly, even claimed the formal support of King Leopold III.¹⁹

When the initial campaign had little success this resulted in a huge political problem, which was compounded by the fact that Rex's greater-Germanic competitors (such as AGRA) started their own recruitment campaigns against the 'Belgicist' Degrelle.²⁰ The reputation and relevance of Rex and Degrelle were at stake. Accordingly, after some serious doubts, Degrelle announced that he would personally join the Walloon legion as an ordinary soldier.²¹ He registered as volunteer number 237 and transferred the leadership of Rex *ad interim* to the lesser-known party member Victor Matthys.

This huge personal gamble paid off. The recruitment campaign now gained a modest momentum, increasing the number of volunteers to 911. Degrelle's personal example clearly was a final push to convince doubting Rexists. A first group of 860 Francophone Belgians left on 8 August 1941 to join the *Wehrmacht* as Infantry Battalion 373. Of those 860, no less than 730 had been members of Rex before the recruitment campaign began.²² For the most part, this first Walloon Legion came directly from the previously established *Formations de Combat*.

On the same day as Degrelle (8 July 1941), the VNV newspaper *Volk en Staat* also launched their recruitment drive for a Flemish volunteer legion. The Flemish SS followed this example a few days later (on 11 July 1941). The VNV recognized the importance of their campaign and mobilized for a huge effort throughout July 1941. Many important senior figures in the Flemish nationalist movement gave their personal support to the campaign, urging young members to sign up.

The propaganda narratives of both parties in June 1941 were similar, one-sided and predictable in the sense that they followed the familiar Nazi tropes. The invasion of the Soviet Union was necessary to protect 'European civilization' against the communist 'Eastern hordes'. This seamlessly connected to their pre-war rhetoric, which served, in both parties, as a mental and political preparation. The VNV propaganda leader, Reimond Tollenaere, had written in 1938: 'Soviet-Russia wants

¹⁸ Flore Plisnier, *Tè wapen voor Hitler. Gewapende collaboratie in Franstalig België 1940–1944* (Antwerp/Amsterdam/Brussels, 2008), p. 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁰ De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent*, p. 38.

²¹ He had already played with a similar idea, having written a personal letter to Hitler (on 10 April 1941) with a request to join the German army as an ordinary soldier (the letter had been ignored).

²² Plisnier, *Tè Wapen*, p. 72.

war! Because Soviet-Russia sees this war as an opportunity for revolution and the decline of the Western-European Christian civilization [...]. To be against war, is to be against Bolshevism!’²³ Obviously, collaborating parties also needed to stress this to cover up the inconvenient truth that it was the Germans and not the Soviets who were the enemy occupier. The VNV added an extra element of historical nationalist legitimization. As Hendrik Elias, the new VNV leader (after De Clercq’s death), said after his appointment in 1942: ‘For the first time in centuries, young Flemish men fought under the Flemish Lion Flag. The unnatural element of Flemish fighting against Germans for a Belgian ideal has not repeated itself.’²⁴ So in VNV propaganda, the centuries-long fight of the Flemish people against foreign (mostly Francophone) rule came to an end thanks to this German-led European war.

In July 1941 De Clercq quickly negotiated an agreement on the conditions of the Flemish Legion with SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Karl Leib (the leader of *Ergänzungsstelle Nordwest*) in The Hague. The 2 August 1941 agreement ‘Guidelines for the Flanders Legion’ guaranteed the autonomy of the legion on all essential points; independent leadership by Flemish officers, separate companies (including for members already belonging to *Standarte Nordwest*), specific Flemish insignia, a Flemish oath, separate healthcare and religious services. There was even the promise of deployment in Flanders itself for those who would refuse duty on the eastern front.²⁵ Indeed, there was great enthusiasm among the Flemish volunteers in this early period because many saw this as the first stage towards a separate Flemish army.²⁶ Degrelle had made similar promises to his members of the Walloon Legion, but in each case such elaborate promises were destined to be broken. As Leib presumably knew, his guarantees to De Clercq clearly contradicted SS policy and would be impossible to keep. This meant that many Flemish and Walloon men made their decisions based on false expectations.

On 3 August 1941 the first Flemish companies of the *Standarte Nordwest* arrived at their training facility in Debica (the General Government, Poland). Three days later a second group of 405 Flemish men departed from Brussels and on 28 August a third group of 150 volunteers left from Antwerp. Upon arrival their new German commander, Otto Reich, told the Flemish legionnaires that they would form one unit with their

²³ Reimond Tollenaere, *Komt er oorlog?*, Aalst, 1938 (quotation from the third page of the eight-page leaflet).

²⁴ As quoted in: Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p.136.

²⁵ B. De Wever, ‘Flämische “Rebellen” an der Ostfront’, in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 39(4), 1991, pp. 589–610.

²⁶ Carrein, *De Vlaamse Oostfronters*, p. 110.



Figure 10.1 Staf DeClercq (centre) saluting the first volunteers of the Flemish legion who are leaving Belgium for a training camp (Brussels, 6 August 1941).

more seasoned SS comrades of *Nordwest*. Most newly arrived Flemings had not signed up for that. Nor did the Flemish SS members want to replace their SS insignia with the new Flemish ones. One Flemish legion-volunteer wrote after the war that of the first 400 Flemish legionnaires to arrive in Debica, 320 explicitly rejected merging with the SS.²⁷ More than half of the new recruits persisted in this refusal, causing Reich to attach the reluctant Flemish volunteers to the existing Dutch legion (*Legion Nederlande*).²⁸ On 24 September 1941, separate infantry units were created (the regiment *Legion Nederlande* and the battalion *Legion Flandern*), abolishing the existing *Standarte Nordwest*. The members of this new legion pledged their oath on 13 October 1941; the soldiers of *Nordwest* simply stuck to their earlier SS oath.

In Debica the gap between expectation and reality continued to widen. The command language and the hierarchical structure remained German

²⁷ 'Relaas van een onbekende legioensoldaat. Ik had eens de boeien aan!!, s.l., s.d., Documents wed. Lamberigts, 21, D 571, Archival and Documentation Centre for Flemish Nationalisme (ADV N). See also: Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 58.

²⁸ A decision later overruled by Berlin.

and initially there were no Flemish medical personnel, no Flemish chaplains or Flemish contact personnel with the VNV. The Flemish insignia was hardly visible and the VNV had no say in the appointment of the commanding officers. The VNV leadership was aware of these problems and, on 11 October 1941, a delegation led by leader De Clercq visited the Flemish volunteers in Arys. This visit was largely for the purpose of propaganda and the party leadership chose to ignore the fact that their formal agreement had been breached on almost every essential point. In any case, by this time most volunteers had little opportunity to escape their situation. After their training the Flemish volunteers joined the Replacement Battalion (*Ersatzbataillon*) in Radom (later Graz) and from there were sent to the front.

The VNV therefore accepted the situation and continued recruitment, basically because eastern front recruitment in 1941 was politically too important. In March and in May 1942 De Clercq wrote formal letters of complaint first to Himmler and then to the German army command. His main complaints, however, did not concern essential issues and were ignored. De Clercq's main problem was the verbal and physical abuse by the German training supervisors and commanders, and the fact that Flemish volunteers were treated as inferior. It was only in early 1943 that the first Flemings were appointed as officers of the Legion.

The deeper political tensions with the SS were never resolved. After De Clercq's death on 22 October 1942, his successor, Hendrik Elias, reopened negotiations with the SS, but was no more successful at reaching a solution. Before his own death the influential VNV propagandist, Tollenaere, remained the main mediator between the party and Flemish volunteers.

The Walloon men encountered basically the same problems. They too were confronted with German uniforms and an oath to Hitler. Many had also been promised that they would not be deployed to the front. Degrelle, on the other hand, feared that the war would be over before he could reap the political benefits from the active engagement of 'his' legion in combat.²⁹ Of the 860 Walloon legionnaires, 268 were brought back to Belgium before 16 October 1941.³⁰ Most likely they were simply deemed medically unfit for military service. Once the order for deployment to the front was announced an additional sixty men were sent home because they were unfit or because they had come into personal conflict with Degrelle. This streamlined Walloon Legion had its first military

²⁹ De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent*, p. 44.

³⁰ Plisnier, *Té Wapen*, p. 72.



Figure 10.2 Leon Degrelle speaking to the first volunteers of the Walloon legion who are about to leave Belgium (Brussels, 8 August 1941).

engagement on 28 February 1942 and within a few months only 150 men were still able to fight.

After the losses of 1942 additional recruitment was necessary. Throughout 1942 and the first five months of 1943, another twelve Flemish volunteer groups left for training. All in all, about 2,600 Flemish men joined and fought within the ranks of the Flemish Legion. They served as a regiment in the second SS infantry brigade on the northern front around Leningrad. About 10 per cent would lose their lives during combat at the front, amongst them Tollenaere who was killed serving with the legion in January 1942. His death was exploited for maximum propaganda value, although Tollenaere had in fact been killed by friendly fire, a fact that was obviously publicly covered up by the VNV. Apparently the 'Tollenaere factor' did have an effect on attracting more young recruits to the legion in 1942.³¹

Degrelle quickly realized the legion had more potential than Rex to serve his political ambitions. He would now focus all his political

³¹ Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 75.

ambitions on the legion. This meant first an enduring power struggle between 1941 and 1944 in which Degrelle steadily neutralized his many direct competitors (starting with the self-proclaimed, would-be legion commander Rouleau in 1941). Gradually – he started as an ordinary private with no military rank – he rose in the military hierarchy of his legion to finally assume formal leadership as commander in late 1944.³² His political ambitions also meant he had to maintain a steady flow of new recruits and so Degrelle launched a second recruitment campaign in February 1942. Four hundred and fifty new volunteers left in May 1942 (337 men would be deployed), including 170 members from the Rexist youth movement (seventy-six of these young men and adolescents would effectively join).³³ By November 1942, only 208 legionnaires were combat-ready, the rest were dead or wounded.³⁴ A third and frantic Walloon recruitment campaign led to the registering of 1,310 civilian volunteers and 388 members of the Rexist Walloon Guard. Rex now also recruited in the POW camps, something which had little success (136 men registered from these camps).³⁵

Despite its enormous losses, the legion's battlefield experiences boosted Rex's (and Degrelle's) legitimacy and propaganda value. Degrelle recognized the SS as the most powerful player in Nazi Germany and lobbied hard for integration. Late in 1942, Himmler was finally willing to declare the Wallonians a Germanic race. On 17 January 1943 Degrelle publicly proclaimed the Germanic racial descent of the Walloons, causing the last remaining traditional Rexistists to leave the party, but Degrelle had succeeded in gaining the support of the SS. He had rendered his more radical competitors (such as AGRA) obsolete and these factions now withered and died (or partly merged with Rex).³⁶

On 17 May 1943 Himmler ordered the Flemish Legion as well as the Flemish members of different SS divisions to merge into the new *6th SS-Freiwilligen Stossbrigade Langemarck* (or *SS-Sturmbrigade Langemarck*), a regular unit within the SS. This decision signalled the definitive end of the Flemish and Walloon Legions. On 1 June 1943 the Walloon Legion was officially integrated into the Waffen-SS as the *SS-Sturmbrigade Wallonien*. With a total strength of about 2,000 men, the Walloon brigade left on 11 November 1943 for the Ukrainian front where Degrelle would have his ultimate *moment de gloire*. A miraculous

³² For an overview see: De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent*.

³³ Plisnier, *Tè Wapen*, p. 73.

³⁴ Balace, *Légion Wallonie*, p. 244.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³⁶ Plisnier, *Tè Wapen*, p. 66.

breakout through Red Army lines in Tcherkassy in mid-February 1944 was the high point of Degrelle's military service. After this, he became the poster boy for all European collaborators. He received the Knight's Cross from Hitler himself on 20 February 1944. Of the 2,000 Walloon men on the eastern front in June 1943, only 632 remained alive in February 1944.³⁷ Of course, these losses were not the focus of attention during Degrelle's triumphant parades in Brussels and Charleroi in April 1944. After the liberation of Belgium (September 1944), Degrelle transformed his brigade into the 28th division of the Waffen-SS and was appointed full commander. Implementing a mandatory service for party members, he recruited 400 Walloon Guardsmen, 600 Walloon members of the NSKK, about 150 or 200 members of the Rex youth organization and 900 Rexist *cadre* members. Before the German capitulation, he was able to bring together about 4,000 men into his division.³⁸

The enormous pressure of maintaining forces on the eastern front impacted the VNV and Rex differently. For Degrelle, the legion was the priority while Rex itself lost most of its importance. For the VNV, it was the other way around; the Flemish legion was simply a strategic element in a broader political power game. This partly explains the different strategies. Degrelle strived for a complete assimilation with the SS, which drained Rex of all its able men, pushed out all traditional elements from the party and militarized Rex as a movement (after being demobilized between 33 and 50 per cent of former legionnaires took on important posts within Rex).

By contrast, the VNV tried to maintain its distance from the SS. The full SS integration of the Flemish Legion in May 1943 was partly responsible for a severe crisis. Part of the enlisted Flemish legionnaires refused to take the new SS oath and this group would become known as 'the rebels'.³⁹ Elias then publicly announced on 14 August 1943 that his party would no longer support recruitment for the eastern front.⁴⁰ On 9 November 1943, while training in Milowitz (near Prague), the Flemish were again ordered to take the SS oath, but 200 men persisted in their resistance. Some were transferred and a handful were isolated and sent to penal units.⁴¹

³⁷ De Bruyne, *Les Wallons*, p. 96.

³⁸ Balace, *Légion Wallonie*, p. 245.

³⁹ Bruno De Wever, 'Rebellen' aan het Oostfront: de politieke moeilijkheden bij de Vlaamse oostfronters (deel 1), in *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* (LIII, 4/1994), pp. 201–15.

⁴⁰ The VNV kept recruiting for the Kriegsmarine, the OT and the NSKK. De Wever, Greep, pp. 518–50.

⁴¹ Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 68.

Five hundred to 800 men served in the Waffen-SS (before June 1941), and 2,600 men served in the subsequent Flemish Legion (about 400 of them came from the Waffen-SS). Between June 1940 and September 1944 about 6,400 Flemish volunteered for the Flemish Legion or Waffen-SS (1,000 of whom were killed).⁴² After the liberation around 3,500 Flemings would flee Belgium to join those ranks (including members of the NSKK, the *Organisation Todt* and the German Red Cross). The total number of Flemish eastern front volunteers is therefore around 10,000 men, 2,000 of whom were killed or went missing in action.⁴³ In the Walloon Legion a total of between 7,000 and 8,000 men served during the Second World War, resulting in 1,337 deaths.⁴⁴

Social Analysis

The above discussion already makes clear that social profiles and individual motivations shifted over the course of German occupation. Yet there are still many research gaps in the social profiling of Belgian eastern front volunteers. This is especially the case for the first Francophone group of 1941 where sources are scarce, partly because of the high mortality rate.

It is useful therefore to first look at Belgian 'armed collaborators' as a whole, a category that reveals different social realities and helps form a basis of comparison for the first groups of eastern front recruits. Fifty-seven per cent of all convicted Belgian armed collaborators after the liberation were twenty-four years of age or younger (only 5 per cent were older than forty-five). Sixty-two per cent were Dutch-speaking (Flemish) and 74 per cent came from a working-class background.

In 1946 criminologist Albert Luyckx, an inspector with the Ministry of Justice, conducted a social survey of 3,748 armed collaborators at a camp in Leopoldsburg. The results showed an over-representation of labourers and that most men came from urban regions. Sixty-seven per cent of these men received only primary school education or less. Ten and a half per cent were unemployed at the moment of recruitment and 18 per cent had been a voluntary labourer in Germany. The age curve is surprising: 48 per cent were between forty and fifty years of age, 30 per cent were between fifteen and twenty-five years of age and 12 per cent were between twenty-five and thirty-five. Thirty-seven per cent had one child and 21 per cent had two children. Of the married men, 30 per cent

⁴² Carrein, *De Vlaamse Oostfrontiers*, p. 111.

⁴³ Bruno De Wever, 'Militaire collaboratie in België tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog', in *Low Countries Historical Review*, 2003, 118(1), 22–40.

⁴⁴ De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent*, p. 12.

engaged in armed collaboration partly to flee a problematic home situation. Only a statistically negligible 2 per cent had any kind of criminal conviction in Belgium before the war.⁴⁵

Historian Flore Plisnier took a random sample of 461 convicted Francophone armed collaborators.⁴⁶ Her data shows an overrepresentation of industrial labourers and of the unemployed.⁴⁷ Evidence suggests that most of the 4,000 members of the *Formations de Combat* in 1940 came from the working class⁴⁸ and that a majority joined Rex as new members in the same year. Francophone Legionnaires at the end of 1943 were 90 per cent 'newcomers' (people who had only become politically active in Rex or other movements after 1940).⁴⁹ The labour element in this period is therefore absolutely essential.

It is important to point out that not all men charged with being 'armed collaborators' served on the eastern front, but of those in the first Francophone group who did 459, or 54 per cent, were born between 1915 and 1924 (making them between the ages of seventeen and twenty-six).⁵⁰ This data remained consistent with the 557 volunteers recruited in 1943, confirming they were still of a young average age and from an urban working-class background.⁵¹

In his study of Flemish volunteers, Carrein used the archives of the *Fürsorgeamt der Waffen SS Flandern und Wallonien* (the German administration responsible for the financial and social aid of the Waffen-SS volunteers and their families).⁵² Based on the transport lists Carrein created a database of 3,262 Flemish recruits with data starting from November 1941. The results suggest that 33 per cent of Flemish volunteers were younger than twenty, 43 per cent were between twenty and twenty-four and 11 per cent were between twenty-five and twenty-nine years of age. If we may extrapolate results from a detailed study of the province of Limburg to the rest of Flanders, we can assume that the recruits before November 1941 had an older average age.⁵³ Overall, the average age of

⁴⁵ Albert Luyckx, 'Les porteurs d'armes', in *La répression de l'incivisme en Belgique. Aspects judiciaire, pénitentiaire et social. Revue de droit pénal et de criminologie* (XXVII, Brussels, 1947), pp. 843–55.

⁴⁶ Verdicts and arrests published between 1945 and 1947 in the Belgian *Staatsblad/ Moniteur Belge*.

⁴⁷ Plisnier, *Tē Wapen*, p. 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–7. Jean-Marc Vanderlinden interviewed thirty-six individuals from this first group, assessing their social profiles and motivations. His results, however, were not representative as we don't know his selection criteria. J.-M. Vanderlinden, *La réinsertion*.

⁵¹ Plisnier, *Tē Wapen*, p. 90.

⁵² Carrein, *De Vlaamse Oostfrontiers*, p. 116.

⁵³ Willy Massin, *Limburgers in het Vlaams Legioen en de Waffen-SS* (Kortesseem, 1991).

the Flemish eastern front volunteer was twenty-two years of age and, confirming Luyckx's data, Flemish eastern front fighters predominantly came from urban areas. The age curve was also fairly constant, meaning that in Flanders there was no peak recruitment of minors at the very end of the war.⁵⁴

The professions of these Flemish men were only clearly discernible in just over 200 cases. The number of hand-labourers was between 60 and 87 per cent, while just 7 per cent were students. In terms of social stratification, 50 per cent were workers, 24 per cent were (smaller) employers, while 13 per cent were clerks. All in all, lower-educated men (workers and clerks) were strongly over-represented.⁵⁵ To summarize Carrein's results, the majority of Flemish volunteers were younger, working-class men from the larger cities,⁵⁶ which the Limburg project confirmed⁵⁷ as well as a more recent study of the Kortrijk region.⁵⁸

Motivations

Martin Conway and Plisnier both label the first group of 860 men who joined the Walloon Legion in July–August 1941 as the 'ideological' group. The majority of these men were mature aged, with jobs and families.⁵⁹ In this case, ideology appears to have been interpreted as anti-Bolshevism, admiration for Rex and Degrelle and a (naïve) sense of Belgian patriotism.⁶⁰ Part of this first group were also driven by fear that the Flemish nationalist legion would secure a monopoly on armed forces under the Germans. To their minds, if a national Belgian legion was forbidden, a francophone Walloon Legion was the next best alternative.

The second group of 450 Rexist volunteers is generally also still considered as an 'ideological' group in literature. Plisnier calls this the 'Children's Battalion', because 170 members from the Rex youth movement joined. Some of them were not older than fifteen and left without the permission, or even on occasion the knowledge, of their parents

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁵ The VNV press in 1942 and 1943 confirmed that initially mainly workers and farmers joined as volunteers, but that gradually Flemish students were also signing up. Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, 89.

⁵⁶ This corresponds to the picture we have of Belgian armed collaborators in general, where 74 per cent were found to belong to the lower-skilled labour class. Huyse and D'Hondt, *Onverwerkt verleden*, 211.

⁵⁷ Massin, *Limburgers*.

⁵⁸ Simon Augustyn, 'Wij zijn hier Heeren'. Een studie over de sociale achtergrond en motivaties van Oostfronters uit Groot-Kortrijk (unpublished Master Thesis Ghent University), 2015.

⁵⁹ Plisnier, *Te Wapen*, 73–4.

⁶⁰ De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent*, p. 11.

(individual cases are known where youngsters were whisked away by their parents at the railway station right before their departure on 10 March 1942).⁶¹ One legionnaire testified that this group was motivated by an 'emotional' sense of duty and sacrifice, reinforced by the wish to not let the old generation down.⁶² Indeed, the influence of strong individual role models on younger men should not be underestimated. There was the charismatic Degrelle of course, but the best example here is Rexist youth leader John Hagemans. This former communist and member of the pre-war Belgian fascist movement Verdinaso, had a widespread influence and popularity.⁶³ When he personally joined the legion in March 1942, practically the entire cadre of the youth movement followed him. An ambitious Hagemans had no qualms about lying to worried parents about the possible deployment of their sons to the front (Hagemans himself was killed after only a few months of combat).

For both groups, but especially the first, it is essential to note that the Walloon Legion was still surrounded by an aura of Belgian nationalism and royalism, which partly explains why this first contingent of 860 Francophone volunteers was socially very diverse. Some Belgicists as well as royalist right-wing circles from the military actively supported recruitment for the legion. In July 1941 these circles approached the entourage of King Leopold III in the hope that he might give some sign of his support. When the monarch remained silent many of them chose to interpret this as approval.⁶⁴ In their recruitment Degrelle and his propagandists would continue to spread this falsehood of formal royal approval as late as 1943. The Belgian army general Van den Bergen, commander of the POW camp in Prenzlau, started a recruitment campaign amongst Francophone inmates on 18 July 1941.⁶⁵ Fifty-one officers presented themselves as being interested; however, once they learned of the dominant role of Rex they collectively withdrew.⁶⁶ Even when Degrelle joined, the perspective for certain essential members of the legion's leadership in July 1941 was that they had joined a Belgian national,

⁶¹ Comment by Eddy De Bruyne to the author, dd. 2 February 2016.

⁶² Michel Simon, *Jeunesse rexiste et Légionnaire 1940–1945. Du feu de camp....au coup de feu* (La Gleize, 1995), p. 122.

⁶³ De Bruyne, *Le corps des officiers*, pp. 55–8.

⁶⁴ Eddy De Bruyne, 'Le corps des officiers belges pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale: le cas de Lucien Lippert, Kommandeur de la Légion Wallonie et de la 5.SS-Freiw. Sturmbrigade Wallonien: SS-Sturmabführer malgré lui?' in Alain Colignon, Catherine Lanneau and Philippe Raxhon (eds.), *Radicalités, identités, patries: hommage au professeur Francis Balace* (Liège, 2009), pp. 247–54.

⁶⁵ De Bruyne, *Le corps des officiers*, p. 248.

⁶⁶ De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent*, pp. 35–8.

anti-communist military corps, and certainly not a pro-German, Rexist or National Socialist militia.

Jacques Leroy's remark that most of these former military men 'cherished the ideal of being a soldier' also needs to be understood from this perspective.⁶⁷ The exemplary figure here is Lucien Lippert, a career officer in the Belgian military who was released from a German POW camp in September 1940 and joined the legion at Meseritz in August 1941. He would become the legion's commander in June 1942 and an *SS-Sturmabführer* after the formation's transfer to the Waffen-SS in June 1943. This man, who was not a member of Rex, would therefore end up in the most extreme wing of armed collaborationism from what was initially a patriotic motive to serve Belgium. Another example is Pierre Pauly, a Belgian career officer whom historian Eddy De Bruyne describes as simply naïve about Degrelle's political ambitions.⁶⁸

Noteworthy among the early volunteers are also a group of White Russians; pro-Tsarist anti-Bolsheviks who had fled to Belgium after the Civil War. The most notable example was Georges Tchekhoff, a former officer from the Tsarist navy (who obtained Belgian nationality) and became a legionnaire officer in 1941. As a staunch anti-communist, he saw the German invasion of the Soviet Union as a liberation of sorts for his people. Tchekhoff in fact also served as the commander of the Walloon Legion for a few months in 1942.⁶⁹

Motivations, however, changed in 1942 when any ambiguity about the legion being collaborationist had disappeared.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, many continued to support the legion.⁷¹ In order to remain politically relevant the legion needed a steady flow of new recruits. Accordingly, the recruitment standards were lowered significantly.⁷² Most historians contrast the 'second-stage' recruitment groups with the first two. The third recruitment campaign was conducted partly in German POW camps. One former legionnaire testified that those who volunteered were mainly the ones who had either problems with the German camp leadership (bad behaviour etc.) or men who simply wanted to escape back to Belgium.⁷³ The promise of non-deployment to the front was again apparently used,

⁶⁷ As quoted in Plisnier, *Te Wapen*, p. 75.

⁶⁸ De Bruyne, *Les Wallons meurent*, pp. 45–8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50–1.

⁷⁰ De Bruyne, *Le corps des officiers*, p. 251.

⁷¹ This was the case of the aforementioned Lucien Lippert. De Bruyne writes that Lippert seemed to remain loyal 'more out of mere military discipline than because of any personal conviction'. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7.

⁷³ Dossier à Charge de Jules Sandron, Archives of the Military Justice Department. Quoted in Plisnier, *Te Wapen*, p. 89.

as was the argument of receiving a paid vacation.⁷⁴ In this campaign some 140 Walloon POWs would volunteer, although there is no individual data on who these men were.⁷⁵ In the final stage of the war, the Walloon Legion recruited amongst any Belgians (including POWs and workers) in Germany.⁷⁶ The common view is that by 1943 the large majority of Rexist eastern front volunteers were men from the margins of society without any real political or ideological motivation.⁷⁷

In a very general sense, this evolution makes perfect sense. The reservoir of the most fanatical or ideologically loyal had already been recruited in 1941 and by 1943 only the most desperate were prepared to join. The latter were mainly urban working-class men. Social deprivation (food shortages, unemployment) hit these areas hardest in 1942 and it was also in these (Francophone) cities that political violence escalated to the highest levels.⁷⁸

The overall evolution of recruitment in Flanders appears rather different. First of all, in the Kortrijk region the very first group (until August 1941) was younger and contained more students.⁷⁹ They were probably influenced, at least in part, by misleading recruitment promises. The volunteers immediately after August 1941 were older and more influenced by the political party line. In Flanders, the political and/or ideological factor was more durable than in Wallonia. The influx of VNV members remained fairly constant until 1943 after which it dropped off significantly.⁸⁰ This is explained by the political crisis within the VNV (strongest within the youth movement) and the subsequent ban by Elias on SS recruitment. The study of the Kortrijk region confirms this; in 1942 and 1943 the number of 'ideological volunteers' was still very high.⁸¹ Throughout the entire period of the occupation of Flanders, the political division of the Flemish Legion was 36 per cent members of the VNV, 33 per cent non-partisan men and 19 per cent members of the Flemish SS. Kortijk also shows a clear social evolution; lower-middle-class men formed the majority until 1943, but in 1944 the working class increased. This was caused by the recruitment

⁷⁴ Eddy De Bruyne, *For Rex and Belgium: Léon Degrelle and Walloon Political and Military Collaboration 1940–1945* (Solihull, UK, 2004), p. 332.

⁷⁵ Plisnier, *Tê Wapen*, p. 73.

⁷⁶ De Bruyne, *For Rex and Belgium*, p. 332.

⁷⁷ Conway, *The rexisit movement*, p. 421; Plisnier, *Tê Wapen*, pp. 89, 102, 112; De Bruyne, *Les Wallons*, p. 130.

⁷⁸ Plisnier, *Tê Wapen*, pp. 104–7.

⁷⁹ Augustyn, 'Wij zijn hier Heeren', p. 148.

⁸⁰ Carrein, *De Vlaamse Oostfrontiers*, pp. 128–9.

⁸¹ Augustyn, 'Wij zijn hier Heeren', p. 148.

in camps in Germany of voluntary and/or forced labourers, who often joined because of their desperate situation.

Understanding Individual Choices

To understand the individual choices men made in volunteering for service, a number of studies offer important context which highlight occupational factors, political ideology, personal psychology and social circumstances. One of the difficulties in using this material is that different authors have understood and applied these terms in different ways. Political ideology in Belgium, for example, may be interpreted to mean nationalism (Flemish nationalism or Belgian patriotism), anti-communism (Catholic inspired or not), loyalty to a party (the VNV or Rex), National Socialism (and/or pro-German(ic) sentiments) and finally a more general support for authoritarianism.⁸²

It also remains difficult to analyse priorities men were making as well as understand the relationships between these factors. Some of the most well-known studies on both legions tend to provide a single dominant narrative of explanation. Plisnier, for example, favours looking at events through a social prism in which political or psychological factors are largely absent.⁸³ This is also in line with a dominant Francophone narrative on (military) collaborationists as socially deviant men. In contrast, Flemish historians Aline Sax and Frank Seberechts favour taking an ideological approach in which social analysis is either absent (Sax) or moved to the background (Seberechts). Clearly, ideology means different things to both. To Sax, it is National Socialism and Hitlerism, to Seberechts it is mainly Flemish nationalism and anti-Communist Catholicism (with an underlying narrative of the naïve Flemish idealist).⁸⁴ In her influential book, Sax concluded that 64 per cent of so-called 'ordinary collaborators' were predominantly inspired or driven by ideological motives.⁸⁵ A majority (59 per cent) of this group even had *exclusively*

⁸² Eddy De Bruyne offers six types of motivations for the Walloon legion: Belgian patriots, defenders of an authoritarian new order, pro-Germans, Catholic anti-communists, men fleeing a problematic personal or social situations and finally men who admired and trusted Degrelle. De Bruyne, *For Rex and Belgium*, pp. 332–3.

⁸³ This relates to anti-Bolshevism, strategic nationalism and ideological fanaticism (pro-Rexism or 'Degrellianism'). These are, however, not personal motives as such, but rather political ones. Plisnier, *Te Wapen*, p. 74.

⁸⁴ Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, pp. 73 and 181.

⁸⁵ Her research is entirely based on letters found in post-war judicial files of convicted collaborators.

ideological motives.⁸⁶ This result has been somewhat refuted by the study on the Kortrijk eastern front volunteers.⁸⁷

Anti-communism is a dominant motivation in Belgian historiography, often with reference to pre-war Catholic propaganda.⁸⁸ What makes it difficult is the fact that anti-communism – and the role of the Church and clergy – was often used as a post-war defence for collaboration, which in context of the emerging Cold War garnered significant sympathy. Accordingly, it remains the most referenced motivation in Belgian historical literature. Anti-communism is clearly essential, but another malleable concept with numerous potential applications. De Bruyne, for example, writes about the supposedly ‘ideological’ first Walloon contingent: ‘the older legionnaires ... did not consider Bolshevism to be a mortal danger worth combating, but rather considered it as a regime likely to jeopardize personal plans.’⁸⁹ Some legionnaires were even former communist activists, such as Jean-Baptiste Barbier, a miner from the Borinage region.⁹⁰

It is important to note that during the occupation the Belgian church and local clergy, in both Flanders and Wallonia, were fiercely opposed to recruitment for the eastern front. Local churches were often the main semi-public fora where opposition against joining either legion was expressed.⁹¹ Public support for the SS by the radical collaborationist priest Cyriel Verschaeve is often mentioned, but he was in fact an isolated exception. Some local priests did discreetly stimulate younger men to join, a phenomena that sometimes arises in post-war testimonies, but it is very hard to know how many. Collaborationist parties also maximized their propaganda through the exploitation and even manipulation of pre-war Catholic anti-Communism. The periodical *De SS Man* on 4 October 1941, for example, quoted a text published by the radically anti-communist Dominican friar Felix Morlion in 1936.⁹² This spiteful text was written in the context of anti-Catholic violence during the Spanish Civil War and was therefore taken out of context by collaborationists in 1941. Nevertheless, it is therefore entirely likely that many young

⁸⁶ Aline Sax, *Voor Vlaanderen, Volk en Führer: de motivatie en het wereldbeeld van Vlaamse collaborateurs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog 1940–1945* (Antwerp, 2012), pp. 160–3.

⁸⁷ Augustyn, ‘Wij zijn hier Heeren’, p. 147.

⁸⁸ Bruno De Wever, ‘Idealistische Oostfrontstrijders’ en “flaminboches”. De collaboratie in België: onverwerkt verleden?, in *Maandblad voor geschiedenis en archeologie*, 1994 (29) 3/4.

⁸⁹ De Bruyne, *For Rex and Belgium*, p. 330.

⁹⁰ Plisnier, *Tè Wapen*, p. 74.

⁹¹ Wouters, *Mayoral Collaboration*, pp. 194–5.

⁹² Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 23.

men were convinced by this kind of collaborationist propaganda, taking advantage of their pre-war Catholic upbringing and social environment.

Speaking of the Walloon legionnaires, De Bruyne concludes: 'Generally speaking, few legionnaires bore the Germans in their hearts.'⁹³ Indeed citing National Socialism as a motivation, an approach favoured by Sax, is itself complex. Motivations ascribed to National Socialism might include anti-capitalism, anti-democracy, anti-liberalism and anti-Semitism, ideas that most likely coincided with a fierce rejection of the pre-war Belgian social, economic and political system. Such a rejection of pre-war society was often connected to the personal bitterness and frustration that many men felt and provided an alternate narrative for individual failure. This rationalization combines certain class distinctions as well as personal psychology, but to understand the exact impact of the National Socialist factor, a proper connection between ideological motivations and socio-personal factors is necessary.

Beyond ideology, socioeconomic factors form another motivational cluster in accounting for individual choice. One essential similarity between both Belgian legions was that, in very general terms, there was a clear over-representation of urban working class (and to a lesser extent lower middle class) men. This is entirely logical. Social deprivation (unemployment, low income, debt, hunger) under occupation hit urban environments hard. Unlike in the Netherlands, severe food shortages were common in Belgium and not only towards the end of the occupation. Joining the different legions, and later the SS, created material advantages for the individual as well as his family.⁹⁴ Yet here too, the choices were not clear cut. There were more attractive and certainly more comfortable options for young collaborators. The pay for several Homefront militias, or as so-called *Vertrauensmänner* on the payroll of the German Sipo-SD, was better and a lot safer than volunteering for the eastern front. Explaining why then so many men opted for the dangers and depravity of volunteering probably requires a holistic perspective, in which individuals set priorities and apply their own set of values and rational to each potential motivation. Thus, even if alternative socioeconomic opportunities offered similar or even better inducements for the individual, this may not satisfy, for example, their desire to fight communism. One well-known example is André Leysen, who was a member of the Flemish *Hitlerjugend* and volunteered for the eastern front in June 1944. Leysen, who after the war would become one of Belgium's leading

⁹³ De Bruyne, *For Rex and Belgium*, p. 329.

⁹⁴ Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 85.

captains of industry, claimed in his memoir that he joined mainly to stop the Red Army from overrunning Europe.⁹⁵

Carrein's research indicates that – contrary to commonly held beliefs – the overall number of Belgian recruits for the eastern front did *not* decrease as the war progressed. On the contrary, it gradually increased.⁹⁶ Hans Werner Neulen's explanation is that political collaborators whose fate depended entirely on German victory felt more motivated to join to stave off defeat.⁹⁷ However, this was not entirely the case for Belgium. In fact, recruitment in Flanders dropped significantly after the surrender of Stalingrad and Italy. This was however compensated (certainly after October 1943) by the recruitment of Flemish men in Germany.⁹⁸ Here there was an enormous pool of hundreds of thousands of Belgian workers and POWs. The aforementioned study of the Kortrijk region confirms this. In Carrein's sample (after November 1941) 1,576 Flemish men registered in Germany (23 per cent of the total number), while almost the same number of men were recruited for the Walloon Legion after June 1943. However we know very little about these men or their motivations.

Even as early as 1941, the false expectations of the volunteers played an important role and have to be taken into account. Many (probably even a majority) of the volunteers were lied to about not being deployed to the front, the autonomy of their legion and the support of the Belgian monarch (for the Walloon Legion). Indeed the prevalence of distortion, and even outright lies, spread by the recruitment campaigns suggests a culture of brazen manipulation in which one may assume men were told whatever was necessary to have them register. The precise success of such widespread falsification is difficult to measure, but in the many cases where it did take place it certainly challenges the accepted notions of who the legionnaires were and why they opted to enlist.⁹⁹ Contrary to what one might assume, propaganda could apparently still have an effect on young people even in 1943.¹⁰⁰

While urban environments have been identified as primary areas for recruitment owing to their socioeconomic deprivation, their prominence in collaborationist demographics requires us to also consider the broader and deeper appeal of propaganda and/or party peer pressure. Certainly

⁹⁵ André Leysen, *Achter de spiegel. Terugblik op de oorlogsjaren* (Tielt, 1995).

⁹⁶ Carrein, *De Vlaamse Oostfronters*, p. 138.

⁹⁷ Hans Werner Neulen, *An Deutscher Seite. Internationale Freiwillige von Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS* (Munich, 1985).

⁹⁸ Carrein, *De Vlaamse Oostfronters*, p. 142.

⁹⁹ Plisnier, *Té Wapen*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁰ De Bruyne, *For Rex and Belgium*, p. 331.

after 1940, Rex aimed a large part of its propaganda at the urban industrialized areas and the working class. The party referred to itself in the 1940–3 period as the only ‘true socialist party’. In Flanders, over 70 per cent of all cities and towns were governed by a VNV mayor, who often actively organized eastern front recruitment from the town hall. Social care for the families of eastern front fighters as well as tangible items (clothes, food, letters of support etc.) were actively organized by the collaborating parties in Flanders, further contributing to social cohesion and sectarian peer pressure. By contrast, Carrein hypothesizes that a similar form of social control exerted itself upon young people in smaller villages and was even stronger than in urban areas, but here it had a dissuasive effect.¹⁰¹

Especially in Flanders, the social (family) environment could work as a strong push factor. Political choices were often determined by social peer pressure and by the direct family. If you were a male adolescent growing up in a family of convinced Flemish nationalists during the 1930s, you had a much higher likelihood of ending up on the eastern front in 1941. For many families that collaborated, having a son volunteer for the eastern front was a source of great pride (albeit mixed with equal concern). The renowned post-war Flemish nationalist politician (and later Minister of State) Hugo Schiltz wrote after the war: ‘I have a brother who went to the eastern front and to us he was a hero, although my mother wept her eyes out when he left.’¹⁰² We should therefore bear in mind that the influence of an older role model – a collaborating mayor, a father(-figure), a party leader, an older friend or a brother – could be a determining factor for adolescents and young men.

Degrelle’s personal hold over young men deserves special attention here. Many legionnaires were enthralled by his larger-than-life exploits and felt a fierce personal loyalty to him. Just one emblematic example is *SS-Sturmabahnführer* Jules Mathieu, Degrelle’s confident and right-hand man on the eastern front from 1941 to 1945. He established his staunch catholic anti-communism during the pre-war gatherings of the *Jeunesse Etudiante Catholique* and quickly developed an unconditional admiration and loyalty to Degrelle. This personal factor appears to have been the driving motivation in him joining the legion, while his Catholic anti-communism served more as a general background. Elsewhere De Bruyne writes: ‘The rest of the first contingent ... comprised sincere Rexists, convinced of the sincerity of those who had recruited them, animated by a true ideal. They had left their families with the belief that they

¹⁰¹ Carrein, *De Vlaamse Oostfrontiers*, p. 125.

¹⁰² Seberechts, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 127.

were acting in the best interests of the fatherland.’¹⁰³ The leader figure (Degrelle) was certainly essential in maintaining this illusion of the ‘true ideal’.

We also have to consider those who joined with a tendency towards adventure or violence. The label ‘adventurer’ is often used as a catch-all term, specifically for the Walloon Legion. This suggests a certain personality trait or even a psychological profile; however, any such definition remains ambiguous and therefore highly dubious. How does one identify an ‘adventurer’ within a social group? Did not all eastern front volunteers – per definition – have this ‘adventurous’ personality trait? Typically, the main criterion simply seems to be the absence of any clear political affiliation. Plisnier, for example, analysed the motives of 392 men from the Walloon legionnaires in the second half of 1943.¹⁰⁴ None of them could be interviewed or left testimonies about their motivations. Plisnier therefore simply used party membership as the sole ‘ideological criterion’. A staggering 79 per cent of this group were *not* members of any political party, while 17 per cent were members of Rex and less than 3 per cent of AGRA.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, this was a significant and revealing difference with the first ‘ideological’ group of 1941. However it is equally a bridge too far to conclude that these 79 per cent had no political convictions or motivations whatsoever (the same way it is probably a bridge too far for Sax to suggest that a large majority of Flemish collaborators were exclusively influenced by ideological motives). It is more accurate to conclude that we actually have no idea what their convictions were at that time as we lack sufficient sources. One thing is however certain: the absence of a clear political affiliation should not lead to the uncritical acceptance of volunteers as ‘adventurers’ without other motives.

Finally, in explaining personal choices to volunteer, we have to consider spontaneous behaviour, which often sees men fleeing a given circumstance before embracing an unknown, and scarcely considered, new reality. Lode Claes described in an interview in 1989 how he almost joined the Flemish Legion:

I was, so to say, ready to leave with my suitcase in my hand – and I returned home. My motive to go was: “No words, but actions.” Add to this the fact that my marriage at the time was in crisis and that I liked the idea of belonging to an elite unit. Later, I didn’t feel the need to join anymore. All decisions, you should realize, are connected to a specific moment.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ De Bruyne, *For Rex and Belgium*, p. 330.

¹⁰⁴ Plisnier, *Tē Wāpen*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Luc Pauwels and Pieter Jan Verstraete (ed.), *Vlaamse macht. In herinnering aan Lode Claes (1913–1997)* (Wijnegem, 1998), pp. 53–4.

Henri Philippet gave the example of a young man who volunteered for the Walloon Legion in a moment of rage after a fight with his parents about his weekly allowance.¹⁰⁷ Philippet himself is another good example. He was merely seventeen when he left for the eastern front in 1941¹⁰⁸ and did so largely because he was influenced by a teacher at his college and impressed by the figure of Degrelle after attending a recruitment meeting in Liège.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The general trends are clear. Belgian eastern front volunteers went from a group of predominantly politically inspired and young ‘idealists’ in 1941 to a group of largely non-political ‘adventurers’ or desperate men. For the Walloon Legion this general shift was clear by 1942, but for the Flemish Legion it became clear only as late as 1943 or even 1944. Volunteers mainly came from urban environments. There was a clear over-representation of working-class men in the Walloon Legion. In the Flemish Legion the lower middle class was more strongly represented in 1941 and 1942; however, in later years the influx of working-class members slowly became dominant here as well. The number of volunteers gradually increased from 1941 to 1944, which is explained by the fact that in the later stages of the war Belgians were more and more recruited among men stuck in Germany and living in desperate conditions.

Beyond such macro trends, probing deeper produces a more complex picture. First, the precise political context in which recruitment took place as well as the arguments advanced remains ambiguous and the available evidence can be misleading. In 1941 men largely joined of their own free will, but increasingly force became a factor. Second, although it is fairly easy to determine the main motivational clusters, it remains a challenge to determine the exact relationship between these in individual choices. For example, although anti-communism was clearly the most common motivation, its exact impact, in relation to Catholic communities and collaborationist ideology, remains difficult to assess. It is therefore necessary to avoid a (seductive) mono-causal explanation. Third, although we can map the basic social profiles of the volunteers, it remains a challenge to determine how exactly the different social environments influenced individual choices. What were the essential variables

¹⁰⁷ Henri Philippet, *Et mets ta robe de bal*, s.l., 1984.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Information provided to the author by Eddy De Bruyne dd. 2 February 2016. De Bruyne conducted several in-depth interviews with Philippet.

present in these urban environments to explain individual choices? All in all, analysis depends on how one reads the sources. In order to systematically locate the individual choices of Belgian eastern front volunteers in a set of motivation clusters we would probably need to combine different types of sources (written and oral).

Oleg Beyda

Introduction

Among the examples of collaborationism in Western Europe, the case of France stands out for its extreme heterogeneity.¹ The ultra-right wing parties in Belgium and Holland that concluded alliances with the Nazis clearly took this step largely from a desire to occupy a favourable place in Adolf Hitler's post-war Europe. The collaborationists faced the need to quickly prove their worth in the eyes of the Germans who, almost no-one doubted, would soon rule the continent. The war against the common enemy represented by the Soviet Union provided ample opportunities of this kind.

In France this process was complicated by the fact that in addition to the Germans there were at least four distinct forces (the official Vichy government and three parties), each of which was trying constantly to out manoeuvre the others. This was in addition to the array of smaller competing movements and 'pocket parties', all of which were radicalized by France's crushing military defeat in the summer of 1940.

For the Germans, the situation was ideal for invoking the age-old principle of *divide et impera*. The most notorious instance of military-political collaboration between Vichy France and Nazi Germany was represented by the 638th Infantry Regiment of the Wehrmacht, otherwise known as the *Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme*, or LVF. Recruited in France from July 1941, the legion was formed in Poland in the autumn of the same year, and fought on the territory of the Soviet Union from November 1941 through to June of 1944.

From the early days of the legion, there were constant difficulties of a military and political kind that were significantly greater than in other Western European legions of the Wehrmacht. The defeat of France was fresh, and the problem was therefore to explain to the legionnaires, who were very diverse in their social origins and motivations, why they should

¹ This chapter was translated from Russian by Renfrey Clarke.

fight under the French flag. Within the French political elite a split took place: on one side were the parties of the ultra-right, competing incessantly both among themselves and also with Marshal Henri Pétain, whose support was indispensable to them. At the same time, many of the political figures on the French ultra-right considered Pétain a 'weakling' who refused to collaborate 'whole-heartedly' with the Nazis. Pétain in turn was genuinely ambivalent in his attitude to the founding of the legion as well as to its activities.

Understanding the full complexity of French collaborationism requires an understanding not just of the nature of the military contribution made by Vichy France on the German-Soviet front, but also determining the origins of the people who were involved. Why would people have found it necessary to collaborate with an outside enemy, especially after defeat and occupation? To begin with, we need to turn our gaze onto the pre-war period and onto the parties that took part in founding the future legion.

'A Dictatorship that Never Happened': Ultra-Right Movements in France in the 1930s

The history of the French ultra-right has its roots in the period before the First World War, when out of the Dreyfus Affair there arose the organization *Action Française*, proclaiming the idea of an integral nationalism that incorporated anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism.² After the war right-wing ideas and nationalism received a new impulse even in the victorious countries, and especially among military veterans. An example is provided by the *Croix-de-Feu*, founded by Maurice Hanot in 1927. Initially, this was no more than a run-of-the-mill veterans' organization with 500 members.³ Later, it would become one of the largest movements on the French right.

The rise of the Nazis to power, together with the economic depression, put wind in the sails of the small French *ligues* that were trying to copy the 'grand style' of Nazism. Among those who took heart at this development was the *parfumeur* François Coty, who had founded and sponsored *Solidarité Française*.⁴ Directly inspired by National Socialism, the ultra-right wing *solidaristes* trumpeted the dangers of 'red fascism',

² Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *Action Française: French Canadian Nationalism in the Twenties* (Toronto, 1975), p. 22.

³ Samuel Huston Goodfellow, *Fascism in Alsace, 1919–1945*. Department of History, Indiana University, September 1991, p. 402.

⁴ Alice L. Conklin, Sarah Fishman and Robert Zaretsky, *France and Its Empire Since 1870* (New York, 2011), p. 191.

and of a dictatorship of Jew-socialists who were said to pose a mortal threat to freedom, family values and the nation while threatening also to import a revolutionary tyranny into France.⁵ In September 1933 Coty's *ligue* acquired a 'twin brother' in Marcel Bucard's *Mouvement Franciste*. Paradoxically, this small *ligue* in 1941 managed to become a party. Although Bucard and his followers played a significantly smaller role than other parties in establishing the LVE, the leader himself was among the co-founders of the legion's committee.

Despite the fact that the organizations noted here were fighting with one another to gain influence, the failed right-wing coup of 1934 served as a unifying factor for them and for several other right-wing parties. Using the 'Stavitsky affair' as a pretext, the forces of the ultra-right provoked a situation that eventually stirred mass demonstrations on 6 February.⁶ The disorder was put down by the police, but it had long-term consequences.⁷ The failed coup d'état paved the way for the left-wing government of Léon Blum, while aiding the radicalization of the right-wingers and their move into clandestinity. The rightists also gained in popularity; by the end of 1935, according to figures of the *Croix-de-Feu* itself, their membership numbered as many as 700,000.⁸ On 18 June 1936 the new government dissolved the *Croix-de-Feu*, but did not prevent its leader, Lieutenant-Colonel François de la Rocque, from almost immediately establishing the *Parti Social Français*.⁹ The party's motto, 'Work, Family, Fatherland' (*Travail, Famille, Patrie*), later became the slogan of the Vichy regime. With the beginning of the occupation de la Rocque's party effectively left the arena because it refused to collaborate with Vichy and was banned.

Providing a symbol of ultra-right revolutionary violence was the *Comité Secret d'Action Révolutionnaire* (CSAR), headed by Eugène Deloncle and whose members were known as the *cagouleurs* ('hooded ones'). The

⁵ Omer Bartov, 'Martyrs' Vengeance: Memory, Trauma, and Fear of War in France, 1918–1940.' In *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments*, ed. by Joel Blatt (New York/Oxford, 2006), p. 83.

⁶ Kevin Passmore, 'Crowd Psychology, Anti-Southern Prejudice, and Constitutional Reform in 1930s France: The Stavitsky Affair and the Riots of 6 February 1934.' In *The French Right between the Wars: Political and Intellectual Movements from Conservatism to Fascism*, ed. by Samuel Kalman and Sean Kennedy (New York, 2014), pp. 25–47.

⁷ On the riot, see: Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France against Democracy: the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927–1945* (Montreal, 2007).

⁸ Albert Kéchichian, *Les Croix-de-feu à l'âge des fascismes. Travail, Famille, Patrie* (Seyssel, 2006), p. 200.

⁹ David Wingate Pike, *France Divided: The French and the Civil War in Spain* (Eastbourne, 2011), p. 283; Zeev Sternhell, 'Morphology of Fascism in France.' In *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right*, ed. Brian Jenkins (New York, 2005), pp. 47, 48.

'hoods' became active after the Blum government took office; they are remembered for the murdering of Italian antifascists and for a bomb explosion in Paris on 11 September 1937.¹⁰ Deloncle feared that after the defeat of the rightists in 1934 a Marxist revolution would ensue, and he was therefore intent on doing in France what Franco had done in Spain. The movement was organized in conspiratorial groups, and it is curious that the ultra-rightists even had an 'Arab regiment' of about 300 men, headed by the Algerian El Maadi. Deloncle declared that in the region of Paris alone he had as many as 12,000 followers, which is probably an exaggeration.¹¹ The 'hoods' enlisted the support of army officers and accumulated a vast quantity of weapons. They built secret prisons for future political prisoners, and began preparing for a second *coup d'état*. Events, however, did not proceed according to plan; on the night of 15 November 1937 a further attempt failed, and arrests followed.¹² Around 70 'hoods' were arrested and were only to be released following the arrival of the Germans in 1940. For a number of important future figures in French collaborationism, the CSAR acted as a 'school of party violence'; hence, the ranks of the *cagouleurs* included Joseph Darnand, later to head the French *Milice* under the Vichy regime.¹³ In 1940 Deloncle himself founded the *Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire* (MSR), as well as playing a considerable role in shaping military collaborationism and in creating the LVF.

Another face of the French ultra-right – and probably the most popular after 1941 – was the *Parti Populaire Français* (PPF), founded in late June 1936. Led by the disillusioned communist Jacques Doriot,¹⁴ it made up for its small numbers with aggressive rhetoric. Although the transformation of the PPF into a 'copy of Nazism' was completed only after 1940,¹⁵ its ideological component was similar: anti-republicanism, anti-parliamentarism, anti-communism and anti-Semitism. What distinguished it from other groups was its claim to be the 'party of the working class'; the PPF boasted that most of its followers were from the

¹⁰ Vicky Caron, *Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933–1942* (Stanford, CA, 1999), p. 295.

¹¹ Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933–1939* (New Haven, CT/London, 1995), p. 47.

¹² Brian Jenkins and Chris Millington, *France and Fascism. February 1934 and the Dynamics of Political Crisis* (New York/London, 2015), p. 156.

¹³ Joel Blatt, 'The Cagoule Plot, 1936–1937.' In *Crisis and Renewal: France, 1918–1962*, ed. by Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander (New York, 2002), p. 89.

¹⁴ Gilbert D. Allardyce, 'The Political Transition of Jacques Doriot.' In *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1:1 (1966), pp. 56–74.

¹⁵ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, WI, 1995), p. 299.

proletariat.¹⁶ The PPF sought to become an alternative to de la Rocque's movement. By the winter of 1936–7 the PPF numbered about 75,000, while de la Rocque had as many as 600,000.¹⁷ With the occupation of France, Doriot launched into furious activity and achieved great influence. The newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* took his side, and his views were broadcast by radio.¹⁸

In the years of German occupation the main rival of the PPF was the *Rassemblement National Populaire* (RNP) of Marcel Déat, second in terms of numbers with about 20,000 members in 1942. Unlike Doriot, Déat was an intellectual, but he had also crossed over from the left to the right, having grown disillusioned with the ideas of socialism. He founded his party, together with Deloncle, only in February 1941. The RNP presented a sort of 'left fascist' option, with a veneer of intellectualism; it rested on the heritage of the French Revolution, and demanded economic modernization. Déat called for universal suffrage on the municipal level, and the members of his party were less inclined to violence than were those of other movements. Even in respect of its anti-Semitism, the RNP was more moderate than its rivals. Déat enjoyed support from the Germans, who wanted to use his party to attract the sympathy of French leftists.¹⁹ The hidden purpose of the RNP, both for the Germans and for Déat, was to bring about a further sharpening of the tension between the parties and Pétain; the RNP was to promote the cause of the Minister of State Pierre Laval, who had resigned in December 1940.²⁰

Apart from the main parties, there were also much smaller marginal movements such as the *Croisade Française du National Socialisme* of Maurice-Bernard de la Gatinais. For the most part, these movements remained outsiders even after 1940.²¹ Probably an exception was Pierre Costantini's *Ligue Française d'Épuration, d'Entraide Sociale et de Collaboration Européenne*, which had no more than 3,000 members.²² In its newspaper *L'Appel*, Costantini posed questions such 'Should the Jews

¹⁶ Peter Davies, *The Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present: from de Maistre to Le Pen* (New York, 2002), p. 90.

¹⁷ Kevin Passmore, 'Class, Gender and Populism: The Parti Populaire Français in Lyon, 1936–40.' In *The Right in France: From Revolution to Le Pen*, ed. by Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett (London, 2003), p. 183.

¹⁸ Michèle Cotta, *La Collaboration* (Paris, 1964), p. 23; Debbie Lackerstein, *National Regeneration in Vichy France: Ideas and Policies, 1930–1944* (Farnham, 2012), p. 18.

¹⁹ *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, ed. by Walter Laqueur and Judith Tydor Baumel. New Haven, CT/London, 2001, p. 184; Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 401.

²⁰ David Drake, *Paris at War: 1939–1944* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 182.

²¹ James G. Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (New York, 2007), p. 38.

²² Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime* (New York, 2002), p. 265.

be Exterminated?’²³ He supported the PPF, and it was perhaps this that brought him in July 1941 to the Hotel Majestic, where the future LVF was being established. After the war he ended his days in a psychiatric hospital.

From the history of the right-wing radicals it is clear that by the beginning of the war with Germany, France was torn by internal conflicts. The ultra-right could not realize its political ambitions in peacetime. Twice, effectively, it had failed to overthrow the government, and the members of the various parties had thus undergone a ‘hardening over time’, with a section of them increasingly radicalized. This meant that with the change of regime – and moreover, to one that was more sympathetic to them ideologically – they would try to make up for what they had lost in the 1930s.

With the beginning of the occupation, the ultra-rightists filled the political vacuum that had opened up, starting immediately to compete with one another for influence and for the right to ‘represent’ France in the eyes of the Germans. As a result, three main centres of power took shape: the official government of Pétain, the Paris parties and the Germans. The party chiefs followed the path of collaboration, and drew their members behind them. The leaders themselves were as ill-assorted as could possibly be imagined: disillusioned communists of working-class background, people with university education, former military officers, terrorists, fanatics and adventurists. Despite their disagreements among themselves, the ultra-rightists were at the same time united by the defeats they had suffered in the 1930s and by their passionate yearning for power. The war gave them an opportunity to try their luck, and also to differentiate themselves from Pétain, who held to a position that might be described as right-wing opportunism. In this way, French participation in the German campaign in the East was predestined even before the first shot was fired on 22 June 1941. One further stage, however, was to precede the beginning of military collaboration.

The ‘Strange Year’: the Vichy Government and the USSR in 1940–1941

As a centre of power, the alternative to the Paris parties was the Vichy government. The relations between Pétain’s authoritarian regime and the Soviet Union perhaps illustrate all the difficulties with which the ‘official’ collaborationists were beset during the first year of the occupation, and

²³ Georges Bensoussan, *Génocide pour Mémoire. Des Racines du Désastre aux Questions d’Aujourd’hui* (Paris, 1989), p. 367.

the degree to which their behaviour differed from that of the squabbling movements of the French ultra-right. Adding piquancy to the situation was the fact that Pétain, who had accepted the post of prime minister before military operations ceased, was not an unquestioning henchman of the Nazis despite their obvious ability to control his actions; his origins were not with the 'fifth column' that viewed foreign occupation as a chance to realize their own political ambitions.²⁴ On exactly this basis, the Vichy regime was initially recognized by a number of states including Australia, Canada, the United States and USSR.

Within the complex, multi-layered Soviet-French relations of 1940–1 three periods can be distinguished. The 'general line', despite the multitude of considerations in play, was the need to maintain the autonomy of Vichy France, such as it existed, and the unity of France's colonial empire.²⁵

From the summer and through the autumn of 1940 the leading Vichy diplomats (Foreign Minister Paul Baudouin, Secretary-General François Charles-Roux, and ambassador to Moscow Eirik Labonne) thought it possible to secure peace in Europe while including the USSR and Great Britain in the scheme. The concept of a so-called 'European equilibrium' (*l'équilibre européen*) was formulated with Labonne's support; according to this concept, the USSR sooner or later would be threatened by Germany, and for its own protection would start supporting France. Meanwhile France, by taking advantage of its ties to Germany, would be able to act as a 'Western counter-weight' that would help restore peace to Europe; this could be attained through an Anglo-Soviet rapprochement. In this way, a mutually advantageous situation would be arrived at: Germany would not be able to crush Great Britain, but neither would it lose its power, while France in the course of the peace negotiations could begin to defend its own interests.²⁶

On the basis of such considerations, these circles called for diplomatic relations with Moscow to be restructured: Vichy actually insisted on Moscow sending it an ambassador, and not a *chargé d'affaires*.²⁷ Moscow did not agree to send an ambassador, but on 10 October 1940 dropped a definite hint when it proposed to appoint as *chargé d'affaires* none other

²⁴ On the initial reaction on Pétain, see: Richard Griffiths, *Pétain: A Biography of Marshal Philippe Pétain of Vichy* (New York, 1972, pp. 250, 329; Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 143, 144.

²⁵ Georges-Henri Soutou, 'Vichy et la Place de l'URSS dans le Système Européen.' In *L'URSS et l'Europe de 1941 à 1957*, ed. by Georges-Henri Soutou and Émilie Robin Hivert (Paris, 2008), p. 65.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–76.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

than the head of the Western section of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (*Narkomindel*), Aleksandr Bogomolov. In this way, the Soviet Union implied unmistakably to Vichy that the *chargé d'affaires* might later become an ambassador. Pétain himself showed restraint; when Bogomolov arrived to present his credentials in October 1940 and attempted to draw from him expressions of a wish for 'improved' Soviet-French relations, Pétain replied in vague terms that he wanted relations to be 'maintained'.

Direct support from the Soviet Union might have been misinterpreted by the Nazis, and Pétain thus sought to manoeuvre. On 22 October Pierre Laval met with Adolf Hitler in Montoire-sur-le-Loir, and on 24 October a meeting between Pétain and Hitler followed.²⁸ Both Laval and Pétain by that time understood collaboration in much the same sense: for them it meant 'to give up as little as possible in order to gain the most'.²⁹ The meeting was not a success for Hitler, who had wanted to obtain from the French a promise to participate in the war against Great Britain; as an eyewitness wrote, 'Laval had been offish; Pétain was taciturn and dismissive. He gave no answer throughout, but his manner said it all.'³⁰ Hitler was disappointed. Trying to smooth over the situation, Pétain on 30 October addressed the French people by radio, calling on them to collaborate and also referring to the need for French unity.³¹

After some uncertainty, a second period began in March 1941. Bogomolov was appointed as ambassador, and on 10 April stated in a conversation with Pierre Bressy, the deputy director of the European section of the French foreign ministry: 'You now have no friends. You are isolated and alone. Friendship with such a great country as Soviet Russia is something valuable. I hope the French government understands this, as we do, and that it wants to strengthen relations, which we should maintain.' Bogomolov went on to mention the possibility of renewing trade between the two powers.³²

There was no longer any talk of 'equilibrium'; clearly, Great Britain could no longer be included in a 'new European order'. There remained only the USSR, that had again dropped a hint to Pétain concerning its attitude to the Vichy regime. Moscow's aim was the suppression of the

²⁸ Birgit Kletzin, *Trikolore unterm Hakenkreuz: Deutsch-Französische Collaboration 1940–1944 in den diplomatischen Akten des Dritten Reiches* (Opladen, 1996), p. 43.

²⁹ René de Chambrun, *Pierre Laval: Traitor or Patriot?* (New York, 1984), p. 50.

³⁰ Nicolaus von Below, *At Hitler's Side: The Memoirs of Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant 1937–1945* (London, 2001), p. 75.

³¹ Michel Germain, *Histoire de la Milice et les Forces du Maintien de l'Ordre. Guerre Civile en Haute-Savoie* (Montmélian, 1997), p. 14.

³² Georges-Henri Soutou, 'Vichy et la Place de l'URSS', p. 79.

Paris collaborationists, as embodied in the ultra-right wing parties. Vichy was thus viewed as a 'lesser evil', and one, moreover, on which Moscow could exert leverage to pursue anti-German policies.

To a partial degree and within definite limits, Pétain too sought a strengthening of relations with the USSR. On 25 April he received Bogomolov. During their conversation Pétain stressed the 'zeal' with which Bogomolov had worked to improve relations, indicating that 'the understanding shown by the Moscow government with regard to France, currently in difficult circumstances' was to the personal credit of the Soviet ambassador. In addition, Pétain expressed 'firm hopes' that it would soon be possible to see how economic relations between the two countries were 'developing in a favourable setting'.³³

The third period of relations refers to May 1941, and was centred on the personality of François Darlan, minister of foreign affairs and deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers. Darlan was regarded as Pétain's successor, and was sympathetic to Germany. He considered that France should pursue its actions in the European context 'under German leadership'. Although Vichy did not declare war on the USSR after 22 June 1941, the diplomatic game drew to a close; on 30 June Darlan summoned Bogomolov and informed him that relations were being broken off. The Soviet representatives then left France.³⁴

The first year of the Vichy regime, and especially the regime's relations with the USSR, revealed the tangled complex of issues and tasks with which the French collaborationists were confronted. The collaborationists were hampered by their role as German puppets, but at the same time attempted to play their own game and to place certain limits on their collaboration with the Nazis. They sought to map out a path through the situation, to see how France might find its way through the looming world conflict and stay out of a war between the two main powers of the continent, a war whose approach was becoming more and more perceptible. Avoiding clear answers, Pétain's government attempted to strike a balance between its own interests; the Germans who were occupying the country; and the hints at improved relations being dropped by Stalin. Success in this endeavour was scarcely possible at any stage, and became still more inconceivable once war had broken out between the two dictators.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³⁴ *Istoriya Frantsii. Tom III*, ed. by A.Z. Manfred, V.M. Dalin, V.V. Zagladin, S.N. Pavlova and S.D. Skazkin (Moscow, 1973), p. 248; Martin Johannes Barten, *Frankreich und die Sowjetunion 1940–1945. Eine ungleiche Freundschaft. Ein Beitrag zur französischen Außenpolitik während des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Hamburg, 1997), p. 92.

At this point, the French parties that had sought so avidly for German recognition and attention came onto the stage. What they had awaited for so long was finally occurring.

‘A Forced Alliance’: the Birth of the Legion

The beginning of Operation Barbarossa caused the ultra-right camp in France to rejoice. Doriot declared to a PPF congress on 1 July 1941: ‘This war is our war; we shall pursue it to the end, until victory.’³⁵ Four ultra-right groups took a direct part in the founding of the future legion. Apart from followers of Doriot, these included Deloncle’s MSR, Déat’s RNP, and Bucard’s *Mouvement Franciste*.³⁶ Pétain equivocated in his support for the proposed legion, although the Vichy government never declared war on the USSR. Soon after 22 June Pétain wrote that he was forced to deal with two doctrines he found ‘undesirable’, Nazism and Bolshevism. Meanwhile, he declared on 27 June that the German attack would lead to the fall of Stalin and would put an end to communism. The essence of Pétain’s thinking reflects the difficulty of asserting a truly sovereign foreign policy.³⁷

The ultra-right party leaders considered Pétain too hesitant in his commitment to the war in the east, so they themselves, with support from the German ambassador, Otto Abetz, called for the creation of an army of volunteers to take part in the ‘crusade’ against Bolshevism. Hitler showed little interest in the proposal, but the idea had promise as a propaganda tool. On 23 June Abetz, with whom the collaborationists were in contact, petitioned the German foreign ministry to establish the legion. On 1 July Abetz was informed that the project would be approved, and this took place on 4 July. The Vichy government made an official announcement, published in the press, declaring that no obstacles would be placed in the way of French citizens who wished to ‘participate in the European struggle against communism’. The announcement applied to volunteers from both the occupied and unoccupied zones of France.³⁸

³⁵ Vinsen Bule, “‘My prishli, chtoby pomoch’ razdaviv’ chudovishche”: frantsuzskiy fashizm ot teorii do praktiki na primere Legiona frantsuzskikh dobrovol’tsev protiv bol’shevizma.” In *Voina na unichtozhenie: Natsistskaya politika genotsida na territorii Vostochnoy Evropy. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoy konferentsii (Moskva, 26–28 aprelya 2010 goda)* (Moscow, 2010), p. 222.

³⁶ Pierre-Philippe Lambert and Gérard Le Marec, *Partis et mouvements de la collaboration. Paris 1940–1944* (Paris, 1993), pp. 7–13, 37–40, 51–5, 91–6.

³⁷ Zh.-A. Sutut, ‘Vishi i mesto SSSR v evropeyskoy sisteme.’ In *SSSR i Frantsiya v gody Vtoroy mirovoy voiny: sbornik nauchnykh statey*. M.M. Narinskiy (ed.) (Moscow, 2006), pp. 90–2.

³⁸ Boris Laurent, ‘La ‘croisade contre le bolchevisme’. Combattre avec l’Allemagne.’ In *Axe & Alliés. Hors-série* (No. 1, 2007), 10.

In response to the formation of the LVF the government also suspended the law that prohibited French citizens from serving in foreign armies. An order was issued to the effect that attempts at recruiting in the *Armée d'armistice* should not be hindered, but efforts in this area yielded virtually no results, and the number who did enlist in this way was extremely small.³⁹

In his announcement, Pétain had let it be understood that the Vichy government would not obstruct the founding of the legion. But the 'approval' from Vichy was extremely reluctant, to say the least. German accounts testify that the French authorities in the unoccupied zone obstructed the recruiting of volunteers. In the occupied zone those who wanted to enlist in the legion faced unofficial barriers. In May 1942 the German-French armistice commission lodged an official protest to the effect that the French authorities were blocking recruiting to the LVF.⁴⁰

On 5 July 1941 Hitler made his decision, with three conditions imposed. The legion was to be a 'private' and not a state initiative; there were to be no more than 10,000 volunteers, and the Vichy government was not to ask for anything in return. In a separate communication, Hitler instructed Abetz to bear in mind that support for the legion on the part of the French government was undesirable.⁴¹ The Vichy government position was dubious: on the one hand, the government saw to the creation of the LVF and did not stint in supporting it, but on the other hand it was building obstacles for volunteers wishing to enlist.⁴²

Abetz received confirmation in the form of a telegram from Ribbentrop, in which it was stated that the government of the Reich agreed to 'accept Frenchmen as volunteers in the struggle against the Soviet Union'.⁴³ Abetz replied that the heads of the collaborationist parties had undertaken to place 30,000 men under arms. Berlin informed the ambassador that instead of 10,000 men the bar might be raised to 15,000, but no more.⁴⁴ Abetz received the collaborationists, and declared that Hitler had agreed to form a legion made up of Frenchmen.

³⁹ Zh.-A. Sutu, 'Vishi i mesto SSSR', p. 96.

⁴⁰ Owen Anthony Davey, 'The Origins of the Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme.' In *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1971, 37.

⁴¹ V.P. Smirnov, 'Napadenie Germanii na Sovietskii Soyuz i frantsuzskoe obshchestvennoe mnenie.' In *SSSR i Frantsiya v gody Vtoroy mirovoy voyny*, pp. 108–10.

⁴² Zh.-A. Sutu, 'Vishi i mesto SSSR', p. 96.

⁴³ Robert Forbes, *For Europe. The French Volunteers of the Waffen-SS* (Solihull, UK, 2006), pp. 115, 116.

⁴⁴ Owen Anthony Davey, 'The Origins', pp. 32, 33; James G. Shields, 'Charlemagne's Crusaders: French Collaboration in Arms, 1941–1945.' In *French Cultural Studies* (Vol. 18, No. 1, 2007), pp. 85–7.

On 7 July the party chiefs met with representatives of the German army in the Hotel Majestic, which belonged to the German security services. A *Comité central* was formed, with Eugène Deloncle as its president. The office of president was on the whole merely honorary, possessing no real power in practical terms. Deloncle spent four months as president, after which the post changed hands almost every two months. The real political weight lay with the general secretary, who dealt with the questions of propaganda and recruiting.

On 8 July the first office for the recruiting of volunteers opened in Paris. By an irony of fate, the building had earlier belonged to the Soviet travel agency *Intourist*. On the same day the PPF's newspaper *Le Cri du Peuple* carried an article calling on people to enlist in the legion and explaining its goals: participation in a 'crusade against bolshevism', the representing of France on the eastern front and the defence of European civilization. Particular stress was placed on the official approval of the legion by Pétain and Hitler.⁴⁵ For the moment, the future formation was termed simply the 'legion of French volunteers'. Although the name 'Legion of French Volunteers against Bolshevism' was already in wide use during August, it received official approval only on 8 September 1941.⁴⁶

Difficulties soon arose with the head of the new formation. On 8 September it was announced that the French General Hassler, former commander of the 236th Infantry Division, would assume the leadership of the LVF. Intriguingly, the general himself had not been forewarned of this, and he learned of his appointment only from the newspapers. A blunt refusal followed, motivated by Hassler's refusal to have anything to do with the collaborators. Hassler had initially taken part in the meeting at the Hotel Majestic, but the results of this encounter convinced him not to have anything to do with the future legion.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français' pour participer à la lutte contre le Bolchevisme. Archives nationales françaises (CARAN) (hereafter AN), F60 235. P. 2, 3; Jürgen Förster, 'Volunteers from Western and Southern Europe.' In *Germany and the Second World War. Volume IV: The Attack on the Soviet Union* (New York, 1999), p. 1059.

⁴⁶ Owen Anthony Davey, 'The Origins', p. 33.

⁴⁷ Dokumentation über die Beteiligung französischer Freiwilliger auf deutsche Seite im Weltkrieg 1939–1945 im Deutsche übertragen von Dr. Erich Kopp. Französische Originalfassung von Robert Soulat in einer nicht veröffentlichten Privataufzeichnung unter dem Titel: "Documentations". Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau (hereafter BA–MA) RS 3–33/3. Bl. 3; David Littlejohn, *Foreign Legion of the Third Reich. Vol. 1: Norway, Denmark, France* (San Jose, CA), 1979, p. 146; Krisztián Bene, *La collaboration militaire française dans la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Talmont St Hilaire, 2012), pp. 443, 444.

Military Requirements against a Political Background

The requirements for enlisting in the legion were as follows: 'Aryan' origins; age from eighteen to thirty years for private soldiers, corporals and non-commissioned officers, while for officers the limit was raised to forty years; minimum height 160 cm; and an absence of criminal convictions.⁴⁸ Later, as an exception, men with a height of at least 154 cm came to be accepted, but the general constitution of the recruits had to be particularly sound. After 1943, sources speak of the LVF accepting recruits from eighteen to forty years, and officers to the age of fifty years.⁴⁹ Eyesight had to be unimpaired. There could be no problems with hernias or varicose veins. Nor could there be problems with teeth; it was enough to have three teeth missing or decayed, and entry to the legion was denied.⁵⁰ Later, all these requirements were set out in propaganda tracts.⁵¹

For every volunteer, it was promised in the propaganda that two French POWs would be set free.⁵² In reality, this never received official German approval, although the members of the *Comité central* asked a representative of Abetz, Julius Westrick, to consider the matter. It was then suggested that the prisoners might be let out at least for a month, but this idea was not given official sanction either.⁵³

The legionnaires were to be generously recompensed. The pay system was worked out taking account of many circumstances: whether a soldier was married, whether he had children, whether he was serving at the front or in the rear, and whether he had been wounded. All these considerations were totalled up, and the resulting sums were genuinely impressive for people of that time. A married private soldier in the rear received 2400 francs per month, or 3000 if he served at the front. For every child below the age of sixteen the soldier received an additional 360 francs per month. Officers received far more. The money was paid into the personal account of each soldier, and could not be spent until

⁴⁸ Pierre Giolitto, *Volontaires français sous l'uniforme allemand* (Paris, 2007), pp. 45, 46.

⁴⁹ Jürgen Förster, 'Volunteers', p. 1059; Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français', AN F60 235. P. 20; Flyers 'Français de 18 à 30 ans!' and 'Français de 18 à 40 ans!'. Paris, 1943. Vincent Domergue collection.

⁵⁰ *Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme. Ce que tout Français doit savoir!* Paris, 1943, p. 10.

⁵¹ 'La Légion des Volontaires Français Contre le Bolchevisme', in *Uniformes. Les Français sous l'uniforme allemand 1941–1945. Hors-série* (no. 29, 2011), p. 30.

⁵² Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Na storone vermakhta. Inostrannye posobniki Gitlera vo vremya 'krestovogo pochoda protiv bol'shevizma' 1940–1945 gg* (Moscow, 2012), p. 143.

⁵³ Jean-Paul Brunet, Jacques Doriot. *Du communisme au fascisme* (Paris, 1986), p. 363.

his return to France. For comparison, the daily wage of a worker in 1940 amounted to 24 francs per day.⁵⁴

In Paris on 18 July, in the *Vélodrome d'Hiver*, a meeting was organized for members of the French ultra-right parties and was attended by approximately 8,000 people. The lack of interest on the part of ordinary Parisians was obvious. Deloncle promised that the legion would comprise a division, with light and heavy tank regiments, a motorized artillery regiment and even a squadron of aircraft. Doriot argued that France was anxious to restore its glory that had been trampled after the defeat of Napoleon. Not only that, but he promised to join the warriors setting out for the front.⁵⁵

There clearly were points of comparison between the future legion and the history of Napoleon's *Grande Armée*. This aspect was played up in the French propaganda. The troops of the LVF were presented as 'defenders of Europe' and of Christianity, as 'new Crusaders', while the legion itself was depicted as a sort of heir to Napoleon's forces.⁵⁶ Some of the legionnaires sensed this continuity, and expressed their thoughts directly.⁵⁷

On 20 August the French press announced that command of the LVF would be assumed by 60-year-old Colonel Roger Henri Labonne, a former French military attaché in Turkey.⁵⁸ Labonne had served in the Sudan, in Senegal and Morocco. In 1918 he had commanded the First Battalion in the Moroccan Colonial Infantry Regiment. In addition, he was known as an authority on the history of the Napoleonic wars. On 24 August Labonne and his adjutant Captain Antoine Casabianca were summoned to Berlin, where they were received by Colonel-General Friedrich Fromm, commander of the German Reserve Army. After two days of discussions on 26 and 27 August, Labonne's candidacy was officially confirmed.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Krisztián Bene, *La collaboration militaire*, pp. 60, 439–441; *Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme. Ce que tout Français doit savoir!*, pp. 10–12; Henri Amouroux, *La grande histoire des Français sous l'occupation. Tome III. Les beaux jours des collabos, juin 1941–juin 1942* (Paris, 1978), pp. 271–2; Guy Bourachot, 'Versailles sous l'occupation', in *Versailles+* (No. 22, May 2009), 8.

⁵⁵ Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français', AN F 60 235. P. 9–11; Krisztián Bene, *La collaboration militaire*, 59; Jean-Paul Brunet, *Jacques Doriot*, p. 364; Robert Forbes, *For Europe*, p. 116.

⁵⁶ Owen Anthony Davey, 'The Origins', pp. 35–6; Kuz'ma Kozak, 'Frantsuzy v Belarusi 1941–1944 gg.: istoricheskie paralleli cherez 130 i 190 let.' In *Frantsuzska-ruskaya vayna 1812 goda: eyrapeyskiya dyskursy i belaruskii poglyad: materyyaly Mizhmar. Navuk.kanf.*, 29–30 listap. 2002 g (Minsk, 2003), p. 183.

⁵⁷ 'Adieu, Tenaille', in *L.V.F. 1er hiver. Djukowo 1941. Suivi de Adieu, Tenaille*. Mayenne, 2011, pp. 50–1.

⁵⁸ Robert Forbes, *For Europe*, p. 117.

⁵⁹ BA–MA RS 3–33/3, Bl. 5; Ergänzende Ausführungen des Oberst Labonne (Übersetzung des Berichtes vom 23. September 1941). National Archives and Records Administration,

'Preserving the Spirit of Reconciled Europe': the Recruiting of Volunteers and Propaganda

The main party organizations in both occupation zones were brought into the process of recruiting volunteers. Everything was accompanied by weighty pledges: the MSR swore to provide the legion with 50,000 volunteers, but was only eventually able to round up 500.⁶⁰

In all, 137 recruiting centres were opened. The future volunteers were told of their honourable role as 'defenders of western civilization', and were promised that they would fight 'on the side of allied armies against Moscow' and 'beneath the French flag, with the weapons and in the uniform of the French army for the honour of the Fatherland'.⁶¹ Not everyone took the legion seriously; here and there the agitation was ridiculed, and the centres soon became the objects of partisan attacks.⁶²

On 27 August the first volunteers arrived in Versailles, at the Borgnis-Desbordes barracks,⁶³ and this date is considered as the birth of the legion.⁶⁴ The occasion was celebrated with great pomp, and leading party figures were present. That day, an attempt was made to assassinate Déat and Vichy Prime Minister Pierre Laval; Paul Collette fired five shots from the crowd at the tribune with its distinguished guests. Déat was wounded in the stomach, and Laval in the arm and chest, with the bullet lodging near his heart.⁶⁵

On 28 August the volunteers underwent medical examination. The military medical commission received 1,679 soldiers, sifting out 800 of them because of problems with their teeth. The selection was extremely exacting, which may have been connected with the fact that the Germans were trying to limit the number of volunteers. Abetz was unhappy at

Washington, DC (hereafter NARA). T-501. R. 223. F. 329, 331; Pierre-Philippe Lambert and Gérard Le Marec, *Les Français sous le casque allemand. Europe 1941–1945* (Paris, 1994), p. 17.

⁶⁰ Rémy Ourdan, *Rapport concernant l'esprit, l'organisation et l'activité de la Légion Française antibolchevique. Vichy, le 12 Décembre 1941*. Service historique de la défense, Vincennes (hereafter SHD) 2 P 14. P. 3–6.

⁶¹ Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français'. AN F 60 235. P 7; Flyer 'En ce moment, des milliers de Français de la Légion des Volontaires antibolcheviques se battent sur le Front de l'Est' (Paris, 1942). Vincent Domergue collection.

⁶² David Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich: a History of the German Occupation, 1940–1944* (New York, 1981), p. 117; Al'ber Uzul'yas, *Synov'ya nochii* (Moscow, 1978), p. 203.

⁶³ The location of the headquarters of the LVF in Versailles was changed a few weeks later to the Queen's barracks. After that Borgnis-Desbordes barracks was used by the Germans until liberation.

⁶⁴ Bruno Renoult and Christophe Leguérandaïs (Châtelet), *Versailles Kommandatur 1940–1943*. Vol. I, 2012, 60–5.

⁶⁵ BA-MA RS 3–33/3, Bl.6.



Figure 11.1 'The Great Crusade: Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism.' Propaganda poster for the French Legion of the Wehrmacht (early 1942).

this strictness.⁶⁶ Later, this situation changed, with volunteers who were examined in October noting that the inspection was cursory.⁶⁷

The propaganda on the radio and in the press proclaimed that by the end of 1941 a total of 8,000 men, 3,000 from the unoccupied and 5,000 from the occupied zone, had signed up in the legion.⁶⁸ This was untrue. Throughout the whole time the LVF existed (from July 1941 through August 1944), a total of 13,400 men applied to join its ranks. Of these, 4,600 were rejected for medical reasons (the same problem with teeth was often noted), while 3,000 were excluded on other grounds. In sum, only 5,800 volunteers were accepted into the LVF, with a little more than 3,000 of them joining the force during the first stage of its existence, that is, prior to the summer of 1942. According to other data, from July 1941 through June 1943 some 10,748 candidates applied, and of this number, the total accepted directly into the LVF was only 6,429. A proportion of the recruits were older than the age stipulated, while others were too young and had never borne arms. But despite not meeting the age qualifications, men in both categories joined the LVF and remained there.⁶⁹ By the spring of 1943 a total of 169 had died in action, while 550 had been wounded.⁷⁰

On 3 September Deloncle handed the legion its banner, declaring it 'the emblem of valiant men' who would fight 'to defend civilization'. In addition, each of the three battalions of the LVF had its own rectangular standard (*fanion*).⁷¹ The uniforms posed a special problem. In the leaflets distributed in Paris, the legionnaires had been promised that they would fight in French uniform, but the party leaders were not empowered to make this decision, and the whole issue proved a fraud from the beginning. On 15 July the chief of staff of the occupation forces in France, Colonel Hans Speidel, proposed that the legionnaires

⁶⁶ Pierre Giolitto, *Volontaires français*, p. 56; Saint-Loup (Marc Augier), *Les volontaires* (Paris, 1963), p. 20; BA-MA RS 3-33/3, Bl.5; Philippe Masson, 'La Légion des réprouvés', in *Les Années 40. La vie des Français de l'occupation à la libération* (no. 36, 1979), p. 984.

⁶⁷ Témoignage du capitaine Jacques Martin. Unpublished manuscript. P. 1.

⁶⁸ Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français'. AN F 60 235. P. 13.

⁶⁹ Rémy Ourdan, *Rapport*. SHD 2 P 14. P. 8, 9.

⁷⁰ Pierre Giolitto, *Volontaires français*, p. 56; David Littlejohn, *Foreign Legion of the Third Reich*. Vol. 1, p. 146; Hans Werner Neulen, *An deutscher Seite: Internationale Freiwillige von Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS* (Munich, 1985), p. 101; Pascal Ory, *Les Collaborateurs 1940-1945* (Paris, 1980), p. 240; Hans Werner Neulen, *Eurofaschismus und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Europas verrätene Söhne* (Munich, 1980), p. 113; Pierre-Philippe Lambert and Gérard Le Marec, *Les Français sous le casque allemand*, p. 23.

⁷¹ Étude sur la "Légion des Volontaires Français". AN F 60 235. P. 23; Brian Leigh David and Malcolm McGregor, *Flags of the Third Reich 2: Waffen-SS. Men-At-Arms Series 274* (London, 1994), pp. 43-5.

should wear their national uniform, but with German insignia. The debate proceeded, while the press and propaganda continued to proclaim that the uniform would be French. On 21 August the *Comité central* was informed that this would not be the case, and that the volunteers would wear the standard German *Feldgrau*. The propaganda campaign had to be reconfigured. While on leave in France the volunteers could wear the khaki uniform of the LVF, modelled on the uniform of the French army.⁷² Pétain deplored the fact that the Germans had not agreed to the suggestion that the French uniform be worn.⁷³ Meanwhile, some legionnaires wrote in letters home that they were proud to wear the German uniform. It has also been suggested that because France never officially declared war on the USSR wearing the French uniform on the battlefield was technically illegal and not recognised under the Geneva Convention. At the same time, refusing to wear *Feldgrau* could result in a prison term of five to fifteen years, but it seems that no one was ever prosecuted for this, given the negative publicity it would have generated for the LVF.⁷⁴ On 17 October a train under the command of Captain Romanovsky set out from the training camp at Deba in Poland to Versailles, carrying sixty men who had refused to serve in the LVF, eight of whom were officers. The reasons for their refusal were various, but included unwillingness to wear a German military uniform.⁷⁵

Securing Pétain's support for the legion was extremely important. On 25 October, the day the military training courses ended, the legion's camp was visited by Fernand de Brinon, the Vichy government's representative with the German command in occupied Paris.⁷⁶ On 26 October Colonel Labonne handed de Brinon a letter, addressed to Pétain, promising that the legion would write new pages in 'the golden book of our brave army'.⁷⁷

On 5 November, when the legion was already on the territory of the USSR, Pétain sent a reply to Labonne's letter; this was also published

⁷² Éric Lefèvre, 'La LVF et la Légion Tricolore, 1941–44', in *Militaria Magazine* (no. 21, June 1987), pp. 42–4; 'La Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme', in *Uniformes. Hors-série* (no. 16, 2003), p. 68; Msgr. Majol de Lupé, *Bericht über die Legion, 3.1.1942*. Archiv des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte, München (hereafter IfZ München) MA 190/8.

⁷³ Zh.-A. Sutu, 'Vishi i mesto SSSR', p. 97.

⁷⁴ Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français'. AN F 60 235. P. 26.

⁷⁵ BA-MA RS 3–33/3, Bl. 8.

⁷⁶ Besuch des Botschafters de Brinon, 25. Oktober 1941. NARA. T-501. R. 223. F. 394–401; Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *Art of the Defeat: France 1940–1944* (Los Angeles, CA, 2008), p. 105.

⁷⁷ NARA. T-501. R. 223. F. 402.

in the French press.⁷⁸ Pétain wrote that the legion bore 'a definite part of our military honour', and with its struggle, made a 'contribution to saving us from the Bolshevik danger'. The LVF was thus defending 'its own country, while simultaneously preserving the spirit of reconciled Europe'.⁷⁹ This letter had an impressive effect, signifying official approval for the LVF from the Vichy government. De Brinon's visit was reported in the November edition of the newsreel *Les Actualités Mondiales*, which also cited the text of the letter. Subsequently, the text was used in propaganda leaflets, where the image of Pétain was accompanied by appeals to join the legion.⁸⁰

Paradoxically, the propaganda campaign grew in intensity after the fiasco suffered by the legion near Moscow in December 1941. Stories of the military exploits of the legion and accounts from its soldiers of the battles were later used for propaganda purposes.⁸¹ A set of postcards appeared, featuring photographs of legionnaires near Moscow, and postage stamps were printed.⁸² Doriot, who had returned to Paris in January 1942, flaunted his experience at the front.⁸³ Other leaders also wrote pamphlets on the 'significance of the legion', trying to attract new volunteers.⁸⁴ Only in the winter of 1942, when the legion had been virtually shattered, did material on it begin to appear in German magazines.⁸⁵ Late in 1941 the LVF attracted notice in Soviet propaganda as well.⁸⁶ In 1944 the French film *Fort Cambronne* was released, depicting the participation of French troops in the struggle against partisans in Belarus.⁸⁷

⁷⁸ Kriegstagebuch Nr. 1 (Band November 1941) des Oberkommandos der Heeresgruppe Mitte. NARA. T-311. R. 288. F.42.

⁷⁹ Louis Noguères, *Le véritable procès du Maréchal Pétain* (Paris, 1955), p. 357.

⁸⁰ Flyer, 'Les volontaires français de la Légion antibolchevique sont des Français numéro un! Le Maréchal Pétain l'a dit.' Paris, 1942.

⁸¹ Feldwebel Alfred Caton, Französische Freiwilligenlegion, 'Szenen aus unserem Leben im Osten,' in *Heldisches Europa: Soldatenberichte von der Ostfront*. Berlin, 1943, p. 75; *La Croisade contre le bolchevisme* (1943), pp. 33, 34; *Des combattants du Front de l'Est vous parlent... Discours prononcés au Vélodrome d'Hiver le 15 Avril 1944 par le Général Puaud, Mgr de Mayol de Lupé et le Lt Jacques Doriot* (Paris, 1944).

⁸² Twelve postcards under the title 'Le combat des peuples européens contre le bolchevisme. La Légion des volontaires français' (1942). On postage stamps, see: R.E. Reader, *The Legion of French Volunteers 1941-1944* (Banbury, UK, 1981).

⁸³ '“Ce que j'ai vu en Russie Soviétique”. Discours prononcé par Jacques Doriot le dimanche 1er février au Palais des Sports.' Paris, 1942.

⁸⁴ Pierre Costantini, *La haute signification de la Légion* (Paris).

⁸⁵ *Signal* (No. 3, February 1942), pp. 9, 10: 'Pour l'Europe...' in *Signal* (No. 4, February 1942), pp. 14-19.

⁸⁶ P. Belyavskiy, 'Vchera na Mozhayskom napravlenii: nastuplenie voysk generala Govorova protiv nemetskikh diviziy i frantsuzskogo dobrovol'cheskogo legiona.' In *Izvestiya*, no. 299, 19 December 1941, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, 'Encadrer et contrôler le documentaire de propagande sous l'occupation.' In *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* (No. 63, July-September 1999), p. 36;

The legionnaires' perceptions of the Soviet Union played a significant role in the propaganda. Labonne at times wrote articles for the newspaper *Je Suis Partout*; as early as mid-July 1941 he set down his reflections on life in the USSR, and in early September he published anti-Semitic material.⁸⁸ On 18 October the words of one of the volunteers were published in the newspaper *L'Oeuvre*: 'Our journey has ended, we are on the threshold of an unvanquished country, on the border between two elusive realities: Aryan civilization and Semitic barbarism. On the far side of this border is another people, an ideal opposed to our own: the destruction of society. We have come to help crush a monstrosity.'⁸⁹

Soon afterward, the Frenchmen set out their first impressions of the USSR in letters home. One was struck by the dire poverty and another noted that 'the Soviet prisoners have the faces of degenerates, capable of anything'.⁹⁰ Another remarked ironically: 'Nothing has changed [for the Soviet people] since the time of the Creation.'⁹¹ Lieutenant Frédéric Pompidou, an uncle of the future French president Georges Pompidou, recorded his impressions of the USSR in the newspaper *La Semaine* on 2 April 1942: 'Their personalities have been reduced to the level of animals, and the average social and intellectual standard of the Russians cannot be compared with anything familiar to us, even if we look deep into our history.'⁹²

'These Legionnaires are Twentieth-Century Crusaders': the Social Portrait and Motivation of the Volunteers

Most of the men who served in the LVF were on average twenty-four years of age, but there were also veteran officers. Some had already fought in the Foreign Legion, or in the *Armée d'Afrique*.⁹³ A number had gained military experience in the Spanish Civil War, fighting on the side of Franco in the *Jeanne D'Arc* company.⁹⁴ A few officers and enlisted men

Bruno Destampes and Hervé Tellechea, 'La LVF en Biélorussie, Juin-Juillet 1943.' In *Militaria Magazine* (No. 222, January 2004), 27–9.

⁸⁸ Vinsén Bule, 'Obraz SSSR i voyny na Vostochnom fronte vo frantsuzskoy kollaoratsionistskoy presse (na primere gazety 'Ya povsyudu.' In *Zhurnal rossiyskikh i vostochnoevropeyskikh istoricheskikh issledovaniy* (No. 1 (3), 2011), 88.

⁸⁹ Vinsén Bule, '"My prishli, chtoby pomoch' razdaviv' chudovishche"', p. 225.

⁹⁰ Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français'. AN F 60 235. P. 30, 31.

⁹¹ Mathieu Laurier, *Il reste le drapeau noir et les copains* (Paris, 2006), p. 29.

⁹² 'La LVF aux portes de Moscou', in *Troupes D'Elite* (No. 19, 1986), p. 365.

⁹³ Saint-Loup, *Les volontaires*, p. 19.

⁹⁴ Judith Keene, *Fighting for Franco: International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (London, 2007), pp. 172, 187.

had even managed to fight against the Germans in 1940. It is interesting that the Germans did not forbid them from wearing their French decorations (if they had them) alongside those they received in the ranks of the German army.

In his report to the *Comité central* in March 1942, Doriot divided the legionnaires into four categories on the basis of their military experience. First were young men with no such experience; then came soldiers and non-commissioned officers who had fought in 1939–40; then soldiers and NCOs who had fought in both world wars; and finally, soldiers and NCOs who had served in the Foreign Legion.⁹⁵ There were also considerable numbers of men who simply wanted to earn money, or who were looking for adventure. Eighteen-year-old Legion volunteer Maximilien de Santerre, for example, admitted: 'Basically, I was attracted to the Legion by a thirst for adventure and acute sensations.'⁹⁶

The legionnaires were typically men of working-class background. Building workers made up 23 per cent of the total, farm labourers 21 per cent, drivers and mechanics 11 per cent, craftsmen and factory workers each 6 per cent, and also petty clerks and workers in small firms and offices, with each category also making up 6 per cent.⁹⁷ One French historian has characterized the social make-up of the LVF as 'very petty-bourgeois and lumpen-proletarian'. Such people constituted the majority of the LVF at around 60 per cent.⁹⁸ Some 40 per cent of the volunteers were convinced nationalists, anti-communists and members of French ultra-right parties and movements; it is their motivations that are most interesting. The differing thrust of the movements and parties often led to ideological conflicts between the members of these formations as well as the latter French units of the SS, which of course did not please the German command.

The French right-wing radicals wanted to participate in establishing a 'new European order'.⁹⁹ One of the best-known legionnaires, Pierre Rostaing, explained his decision to enlist in the legion as follows: 'I'm a Frenchman. I'm an anti-communist. I'm a soldier. I'm answering the summons of Marshal Pétain to defend France.'¹⁰⁰ LVF Lieutenant Rémy Ourdan wrote: 'The struggle against Bolshevism is indispensable.

⁹⁵ Owen Anthony Davey, 'The Origins', p. 42.

⁹⁶ Maximilien de Santerre, *Ihr Name ist Legion. Zwölf Jahre unter Berufsverbrechern in der Sowjetunion* (Munich, 1962), p. 13.

⁹⁷ Pierre Giolitto, *Volontaires français*, pp. 84, 85.

⁹⁸ Olivier Dard, *Les archives Keystone sur la LVF* (Paris, 2005), p. 8.

⁹⁹ Yves Armani, *Les pendus de Wildflecken 1941–1945* (Paris, 2013), pp. 8–10.

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Rostaing, *Le prix d'un serment, 1941–1945. Des plaines de Russie à l'enfer de Berlin* (Paris, 2008), p. 16.

Considering the European character of this struggle, it becomes important to take part in it. The presence of the French expeditionary force in Russia becomes one of our unquestionable duties if France wishes to take part in the founding of a New Europe, and if it wants to regain the title of a great power.¹⁰¹

Senior Officer Cadet Claudé declared that he had joined the legion 'out of pure idealism', and saw the LVF as a means of 'cleansing' France.¹⁰² The fanatical chaplain of the LVF, Monsignor Jean de Mayol de Lupé, who would usually conclude Sunday mass with the cry 'Heil Hitler!', viewed the legion as a way to bring about the 'rebirth' of France – and this 'rebirth' had to occur through a 'struggle against Bolshevism'.¹⁰³ In itself, the legion was perceived by the ultra-right as 'confirming' to the Reich that France was joining the 'new order', and consequently, was joining in the fight against the USSR. Even if the legionnaires were few in number, the idea went, it was they who would have to represent their country after the end of the war.¹⁰⁴

On 26 November 1941 Deloncle's adjutant, Jean Vanor,¹⁰⁵ who served in the legion's *Propagandakompanie*, described with particular clarity the political-ideological story behind the founding of the legion: 'The LVF is the truest guarantee of Franco-German friendship. It fights against Bolshevik barbarism and for the future international alliance between our priceless fatherlands. Working, fighting, and if need be dying honourably and loyally in its ranks, we carry out the will of the Führer and the Marshal, serving immortal France and the Europe of tomorrow. For Great Germany! For its Führer Adolf Hitler!'¹⁰⁶ Ourdan also acknowledged the political character of the LVF.¹⁰⁷

Politics, undoubtedly, had a place among the motivations of the French legionnaires. According to one source, 30 per cent had no political attachments, but approved on the whole of the policies of Pétain. A further 20 per cent were activists of the PPF, and 20 per cent of the MSR; 5 per cent were *Francists*; 5 per cent were members of the RNP or

¹⁰¹ Rémy Ourdan, *Rapport*. SHD 2 P 14. P 21.

¹⁰² Oberfähnrich Claudé, *Meldung über ehrenrührige Handlungen gewisser Offiziere de LVF, die mit der Soldatenethre nicht im Einklang stehen, und über die bedenkliche Rückwirkung dieser Vorfälle auf die Moral der Truppe*. NARA. T-501. R. 223. F. 101.

¹⁰³ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940–1944* (New York, 2003), p. 269; Msgr. Majol de Lupé, *Bericht über die Legion*, 3.1.1942. IfZ München MA 190/8.

¹⁰⁴ David Charles Lewis, *European Unity and the Discourse of Collaboration: France and Francophone Belgium, 1938–1945* (Department of History, University of Toronto, 1996), p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ His real name was Jean Van Ormelingen.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Giolitto, *Volontaires français*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ Rémy Ourdan, *Rapport*. SHD 2 P 14. P 12.

some other political party; 5 per cent were professional soldiers, and the remaining 15 per cent had no political convictions at all.¹⁰⁸ This would suggest that the LVF was simultaneously a diverse political movement and a military formation, a situation which aroused conflict. The legion was therefore obliged to work out what it represented.¹⁰⁹

Yet there is also evidence that suggests the LVF was much more a reflection of PPF membership. On 5 April 1944 the LVF inaugurated a monument in Lyon commemorating legionnaires that perished between 1941 and August 1943. From 232 listed KIAs (which was probably incomplete), 141 were said to be from the PPF, which is 60 per cent. Of all fifty-one killed in 1941, thirty-four were members of the PPF, which is 66 per cent; that is up to two-thirds of all volunteers killed.¹¹⁰ Although rival parties certainly contributed to LVF membership, such figures suggest that Doriot's PPF definitely had the upper hand.

Making up a special category among the ideologically motivated legionnaires were the volunteers who were not of French extraction – White émigrés and others whose origins lay in the former Russian Empire (Georgians, Russians and Ukrainians). For many of them, the key motive for enlisting in the LVF was a wish to continue the unfinished war against communism, Soviet power and the Bolshevik state, which had achieved a degree of consolidation over the previous decades.¹¹¹ According to information from the Russian community, as many as 300 Russian émigrés tried to enlist in the legion by the end of November, but due to a ban on accepting such cadres into the Wehrmacht, most of them were not accepted.¹¹² A few dozen were nevertheless able to evade the barriers erected by the Germans and fought late in 1941 outside

¹⁰⁸ BA-MA RS 3-33/3, Bl. 18, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Owen Anthony Davey, *La Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme: A Study in the Military Aspects of French Collaboration, 1941-1942* (Department of History, The University of New Brunswick, April 1969), p. 34.

¹¹⁰ 'Liste des martyrs et des héros du Parti Populaire Français', in *Emancipation Nationale*. No. 404, 8 June 1944, pp. 4, 5. Antoine Pettinotti collection; Vincent Domergue, *Le monument aux Morts de la L.V.F. à Lyon*. Unpublished manuscript. P. 1-4.

¹¹¹ Judith Keene, 'Fighting for God, for Franco and (most of all) for Themselves: Right-Wing Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.' In *War Volunteering in Modern Times: from the French Revolution to the Second World War*, ed. by Christine G. Krüger and Sonja Levsen (New York, 2011), p. 225.

¹¹² Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii (hereafter GARF). F. R-5759. Op. 1. D. 55. L. 58 (ob.), 59; 'Einreisen von Emigranten und Beauftragtes des Vatikan in die neu besetzten Ostgebiete', OKW, WFST/Abt.L (IV/Qu), Nr. 01502/41 geh., 25.7.1941. BA-MA RW 4/329; *The East Came West: Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist Volunteers in the German Armed Forces, 1941-1945*, ed. by Antonio J. Muñoz. New York, 2001, p. 183.

Moscow, where at least one was killed and several more suffered wounds and frostbite.¹¹³ A few members of the Armenian emigration also tried to join the legion.¹¹⁴

The most 'exotic' soldiers were the non-Europeans. As many as 200 Arabs from North Africa served in the III Battalion from December 1941 through February 1942.¹¹⁵ They made up an artillery battery and were relatively old in years.¹¹⁶ In March 1942 they were assigned to a separate 15th 'Arab' company, but most of them were later excluded from the legion, with only a few individuals remaining. Some Arab volunteers tried to enlist in the LVF even in the spring of 1943.¹¹⁷

About twelve black men served in the legion, and one of them died in battle near Moscow.¹¹⁸ Surprisingly, some of these 'non-Aryans' were ultra-rightists.¹¹⁹ There were also several Bretons and a few volunteers of other nationalities.¹²⁰

Various public figures believed in the legion's 'mission' and extolled the unit, their praise being used later in propaganda.¹²¹ The Rector of the Paris Catholic Institute, Cardinal Alfred Baudrillart, declared on 4 December 1941 that the LVF represented a 'new chivalry', and the 'living embodiment of medieval France'. Baudrillart termed the legionnaires 'the best sons of France' and 'twentieth-century crusaders', while blessing their weapons.¹²²

The LVF officers themselves subsequently provided diverse, but invariably adverse assessments of the initial composition of the legion and of the motivation of the legionnaires. Lieutenant Ourdan in his

¹¹³ 'Pis'ma chitateley', in *Novoe Slovo. Berlin No. 87, 31 October 1943*, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ T. S. Drambyan, 'Uchastie armyanskikh kommunistov Yuzhnoy i Tsentral'noy Frantsii v Dvizhenii Soprotivleniya (1941–1944 gg.)', in *Izvestiya Akademii Nauk Armyanskoy SSR*, no. 11, 1964, pp. 51, 52.

¹¹⁵ Robert Forbes, *For Europe*, p. 123.

¹¹⁶ Témoignage de capitaine Jacques Martin. Unpublished manuscript, p. 17.

¹¹⁷ Pierre Bonnard, 'Le séquestre de l'entreprise Lafarge en Ardèche (1944–1947)', in *Cahier de Mémoire d'Ardèche et Temps Présent* (No. 100, 2008), p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Carlos Cabellero Jurado, *¿Hitler o Napoleón? La Legión de Voluntarios Franceses en la Campaña de Rusia* (Granada, 2000), p. 197.

¹¹⁹ See the example of Norbert Désirée in: Serge Bilé, *Sombres bourreaux. Collabos africains, antillais, guyanais, réunionnais, et noirs américains dans la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* (Saint-Malo, 2011).

¹²⁰ George Broderick, 'The Breton Movement and the German Occupation 1940–44 – Alan Heusaff and Bezen Perrot: A Case-Study', in *Form und Struktur in der Sprache: Festschrift für Elmar Ternes*, ed. by Armin R. Bachmann, Christliebe El Mogharbel and Katja Himstedt (Tübingen, 2010), pp. 62–4.

¹²¹ Flyer, 'Patriote Français en t'engageant à la Légion des Volontaires Français tu seras calomnié et insulté' (Paris, 1942).

¹²² Maurice-Ivan Sicard, 'Son Éminence le Cardinal Baudrillart vous parle....' In *Le Cri du Peuple*, 4 December 1941.

account noted that the majority of those whom he observed and whom he commanded were men from civilian jobs, or unemployed, who had joined the LVF for money and not ideological reasons. In the platoon under his command the situation was as follows: 85 per cent had enlisted for the money, 10 per cent from a combination of material needs and ideological conviction, and 5 per cent from ideological conviction alone. Ourdan's assessment of the Legion as a whole was that 75 per cent had joined up for family reasons, while 25 per cent had enlisted for a range of obscure reasons which they themselves could not explain.¹²³

The commander of the French Propaganda Company, the veteran of the Spanish Civil War and of the Soviet-Finnish War First Lieutenant Jean Fontenoy, observed that the legion was made up of very young men and relatively old ones; the soldiers were either eighteen years old or over fifty-five. Some did not know how to handle their weapons, while others had served through the First World War. The numbers of idealists and adventurers were roughly equal.¹²⁴ One of the commanders of the I Battalion, Major Jean Xavier Simoni, wrote in 1943 that most of his troops looked on their stay in Russia as an opportunity to eat better than in France, and to relax from time to time in the company of women and vodka.¹²⁵

The impressions formed by the Germans were negative as well. Characterizing the legionnaires, the liaison officer attached to the LVF, Captain Winneberger, noted that they were mostly men of an adventurist cast of mind. In his view, the LVF was extremely heterogeneous. Old soldiers fought alongside youths who had never been under fire; meanwhile, idealists who had joined the LVF to fight against the Bolshevik army were a distinct minority.¹²⁶ Captain of the General Staff von Tarbuk, who inspected the Legion in December 1941, noted the poor discipline and the difference between the relatively elderly officers and the rank-and-file legionnaires, among whom were good soldiers.¹²⁷

¹²³ Rémy Ourdan, *Rapport*. SHD 2 P 14. P. 7, 8.

¹²⁴ Bericht des Oberleutnants Fontenoy, P.K.-Führer, über die dem Angriff vom 1. XII. Vorangegangenen Ereignisse und über den Angriff selbst, 29.12.41. IfZ München MA 190/8.

¹²⁵ Jean Xavier Simoni, *Rapport sur le situation de la L.V.F. dans l'Est (1er Bataillon du 638e Régiment Français d'Infanterie)*. Versailles, le 24 Juin 1943. AN 3 W 110. P. 3.

¹²⁶ Owen Anthony Davey, 'The Origins', p. 42.

¹²⁷ Hauptmann i.G. von Tarbuk, *Besuch bei der franz. Legion*, 9.12.1941. NARA. T-314. R. 351. F. 1234-1236.

Dyutkovo: the 638th Infantry Regiment Goes into Action

On 22 October the 638th Infantry Regiment, the designation by which the LVF was identified within the German army, received orders to make its way from its training camp in Deba to Smolensk, and to reinforce the 7th Infantry Division.¹²⁸ The LVF was not ready for military action, and had already begun to disintegrate on its long, disorganized march to the east. As soon as it arrived in the combat zone conflicts broke out within the unit, and the authority of the officers became divided. Discipline was lacking, supplies were inadequate, and many of the personnel were sick. In the course of the march approximately 400 soldiers had dropped out of the ranks, after becoming lost, lagging behind, falling sick, vanishing without trace, or deserting. The Frenchmen had also lost a considerable number of horses.¹²⁹ But whatever the case, the LVF had reached the front, and now had to prove itself in battle.

The Frenchmen were welcomed in the name of the VII Army Corps by General Wilhelm Farmbacher, who in a command issued in French described them as comrades 'in life and in death'. The 13th and 14th companies were assessed as 'not ready to be employed'.¹³⁰ Lieutenant-General von Gablenz tried immediately to help the Frenchmen. The division gave them horses and carts to replace those that had been lost or that had lagged behind, and additional training exercises, conducted by German officers fluent in French, were organized for the artillerymen and anti-tank crews. The training provided earlier to the legion's artillerymen had in essence been non-existent.¹³¹

On 24 November the legionnaires for the first time came under fire from Soviet artillery. The Frenchmen were in unfavourable positions, and the Russians struck them precisely, blowing up the French ammunition dump with a direct hit. Twice a day or more the telephone line was cut, and maps were inaccurate.¹³² Neither provisions nor ammunition had been brought to some platoons, and officers were forced to go and try to obtain them. The Frenchmen were suffering from cold and lack of sleep, and there was insufficient food. The unshaven legionnaires, eaten alive by lice, were melting snow in order to get drinking water.¹³³ During the nights, the thermometer dropped as low as minus 40 degrees Celsius.

¹²⁸ Jürgen Förster, 'Volunteers', p. 1062.

¹²⁹ Robert Forbes, *For Europe*, p. 122; Pierre Giolitto, *Volontaires français*, p. 120.

¹³⁰ Jürgen Förster, *Volunteers*, p. 1063.

¹³¹ Éric Lefèvre and Jean Mabire, *Par -40° devant Moscou. Les Français de la L.V.F., 1941* (Paris, 2004), pp. 130, 131, 138; Rémy Ourdan, *Rapport*. SHD 2 P 14. P. 14, 15, 21.

¹³² Oberleutnant Fontenoy, *Bericht*, 29.12.1941. IfZ München MA 190/8.

¹³³ 'Rapport d'un chef de groupe,' in *L.V.F. 1er hiver*, p. 15.

The number of soldiers suffering from severe frostbite mounted.¹³⁴ Often, the frost made weapons unserviceable; machine-guns and rifles jammed constantly, and as one of the soldiers wrote, 'men felt betrayed by their own weapons'.¹³⁵

In such conditions, and especially given inadequate training of the men, not much may be expected of them in battle, yet on 1 December the Frenchmen launched an attack that achieved its goal, but revealed a clear weakness in Labonne's command. The unit's heavy weaponry had not been brought to bear and, accordingly, the Frenchmen had not managed to build on the success of the attack. According to the count made by the 7th Division, the French lost twelve men killed and fifty-five wounded. A small number of Red Army soldiers had been captured, and twelve dug-outs had been seized along with three machine-guns. It was noted that the Russians had lost numerous men, and that the French officers and soldiers had 'fought well'.¹³⁶ The losses may have been higher than were announced, that is, around sixteen to eighteen men, since the Frenchmen during the days that followed occasionally found more corpses, and wounded men later died in field hospitals.¹³⁷

During the days that followed the legion continued losing personnel. The commander of the 1st Company, Lieutenant Genest, contracted dysentery, leading the commander of the I Battalion Planard de Villeneuve to combine both companies under the command of Lieutenant Dupont. The legionnaires were subjected to heavy artillery bombardment; on the evening of 1 December alone as many as 200 shells hit their positions.¹³⁸ By 5 December the companies of the I Battalion had shrunk appallingly. The 1st Company now had twenty-six soldiers, while the 3rd Company had thirty.¹³⁹ 'The dressing stations were full of wounded, and especially of severely frostbitten men who displayed hands as white as wax, and rigid legs with feet blackened by irreversible putrefaction that ate through the flesh to the bones.'¹⁴⁰ Individual legionnaires, disenchanted with everything, defected to the side of the Red Army.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ BA-MA RS 3-33/3, Bl. 12.

¹³⁵ 'Sur la land nommée 'Grosvater', in *L. VF 1er hiver*, p. 17.

¹³⁶ Meldungen u. Anträge an vorgesetzte Dienststellen (8.10.1941 – 5.12.1941). Generalkommando VII. Armeekorps, Ia. Anlagen zum Kriegstagebuch Vc. NARA. T-314. R. 351. F. 37.

¹³⁷ Mathieu Laurier, *Il reste le drapeau noir et les copains*, p. 31; Kuz'ma Kozak, 'Frantsuzy v Belarusi 1941–1944 gg.', p. 184.

¹³⁸ 'La LVF aux portes de Moscou', p. 365.

¹³⁹ Caporal Charles Larfoux, *Carnet de campagne d'un agent de liaison. Russie hiver 1941–1942* (Paris, 2008), p. 88; Krisztián Bene, *La collaboration militaire*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁰ 'Les dernières heures', in *L. VF 1er hiver*, p. 36.

¹⁴¹ Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoy istorii (hereafter RGASPI). F. 495. Op. 77. D. 32. L. 60–65.

As morning approached on 6 December, the battalion's vulnerable positions came under attack. The thrust was held back, but at 4 pm the battalion began to be withdrawn from its positions.¹⁴² After only a brief period in battle, the legion was effectively broken, and needed to be replaced.¹⁴³ On 8 December the withdrawal began of the II Battalion, whose soldiers were suffering from bronchitis, frostbite and sinusitis. The positions of the Frenchmen were taken by Germans from the 19th Regiment.¹⁴⁴

What were the overall results of the use of the LVF in combat? This is a very contentious point, and various figures were cited even during the war. According to the official account issued on 12 January 1942, only 1,200 legionnaires were at the front, and of these 700 took part in military actions in the vicinity of Moscow.¹⁴⁵ The most likely figures are as follows: 500 men were out of action from frostbite and illness before the attack on 1 December. Losses during the December battles were fifty killed, 120 wounded and 200 frostbitten (many of them had limbs amputated), with 100 evacuated during and after the attack, for a total of 970 men.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

The French legion founded in the autumn of 1941 initially had a dual nature, political and military. It was meant to act as a 'guarantee' to the Reich, but this was more of a political than a military character. It was a guarantee that France – if, in a sense, purely rhetorically – had chosen the political path of joining the 'new European order'. The position adopted by the Vichy government with relation to the founding of the legion – a position which later underwent changes – was characterized by this desire to 'please' the Reich, while at the same time serving French interests. On the part of Vichy, the LVF was more of a political than a military gesture. It was meant to demonstrate to Berlin that the question of France had a 'positive dynamic'. The trouble was that Hitler, from the very beginning, felt no need for this collaboration.

¹⁴² Jean-Paul Brunet, *Jacques Doriot*, p. 373; 'Dernières notes du P.C.', in *L. VF 1-er hiver*, p. 40; Kriegstagebuch Vd (6.12.1941 – 20.4.1942). Generalkommando VII.A.K./Ia. NARA. T-314. R. 351. F. 522.

¹⁴³ Kriegstagebuch Nr.1 (Band Dezember 1941). NARA. T-311. R. 288. F. 214.

¹⁴⁴ BA-MA RS 3-33/3, Bl. 16; Kriegstagebuch Vd (6.12.1941 – 20.4.1942). NARA. T-314. R. 351. F. 526.

¹⁴⁵ BA-MA RS 3-33/3, Bl. 17; Étude sur la 'Légion des Volontaires Français'. AN F 60 235. P. 28.

¹⁴⁶ Krisztián Bene, 'Les combats de la LVF en Union Soviétique', in *Ligne de Front* (No. 46, November–December 2013), p. 29.

Militarily, the legion can be numbered among the Wehrmacht's least successful foreign formations. The legionnaires were a motley bunch, divided overall into two parts: people with political motivations, and those driven by material considerations. The recruiting of volunteers was accompanied by resounding promises, from the wearing of the French uniform to the freeing of French prisoners for each volunteer who joined up. These inducements were supposed to 'reconcile' the Frenchmen to the fact that they were joining the 'Boche' army. The promises were broken, and the excuses provided for this were so wretched as to have an extremely adverse effect on the soldiers' morale. Predictably, the use of the legion at the front proved unsuccessful, and the clearly disappointed Germans therefore decided to withdraw the legion and refashion it. Following a 'purge' by the Germans, the now-divided battalions of the legion took part with considerable zeal for a little over two years in anti-partisan warfare in Belarus.

12 Norway

Sigurd Sørli

Following Nazi Germany's invasion of Norway in 1940, Hitler entrusted Vidkun Quisling and his marginal fascist party *Nasjonal Samling* with the task of forming a collaborationist regime. Despite grand visions and initial optimism, Quisling and his party soon suffered a series of disappointments, and by the summer of 1941 disillusionment was already rife. Arguably, no other event during the occupation sparked as much enthusiasm within *Nasjonal Samling* as Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Within days of the attack, the party, in cooperation with German agencies, had launched a massive campaign to recruit Norwegian volunteers to a Norwegian legion, which was meant to take part in the 'crusade against Bolshevism'. The expectations could hardly have been higher. Quisling envisioned thousands of volunteers, increased popular support for the party, and significant political and territorial gains. This chapter explores the efforts to mobilize Norwegians for military service following the attack in the East, examining the aims and policies of the German agencies and *Nasjonal Samling*, the responses of the Norwegian population, the motives of the volunteers, and the fate of the Norwegian Legion.

Norway under Nazi Rule

Nazi Germany's invasion on 9 April 1940 took the Norwegian government and society by total surprise. Following the outbreak of war in September 1939, the Norwegian government declared its neutrality. The government's line of policy rested on the assumptions that both Nazi Germany and the Western powers found Norwegian neutrality to be in accordance with their interests and that Britain, at any rate, given its strategic interests and superior sea power, would prevent any prospective German attempts to land forces on Norwegian soil.¹ Although steps

¹ Olav Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations – A History* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2nd edn, 2005), pp. 77–87; Odd-Bjørn Fure, *Mellomkrigstid 1920–1940* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget,

were taken to strengthen the country's military defence in the years prior to the invasion, Norway was by no means prepared – whether militarily, administratively or mentally – to face an all-out invasion by the German *Wehrmacht*. Already by the end of April, the invader had compelled the poorly equipped and trained Norwegian and Allied forces to evacuate South Norway, and in early June, following the Allied decision to withdraw its troops due to the critical situation on the European continent, the Norwegian government, along with elements of the armed forces, left the country with the intention of continuing the struggle from British exile. On 10 June the remaining Norwegian military forces signed a capitulation treaty with the Germans.²

Nazi Germany's invasion of Norway was by no means prepared and envisaged as a war of extermination or even subjugation, but rather as a 'peaceful' operation followed by endeavours to win over a racially favourable population to the National Socialist cause.³ Ostensibly, the original plan for the occupation of Norway was to leave the daily administration of the internal affairs to a quasi-legal body which was to be overseen by the German Foreign Office. However, the plan was disrupted by the events. The Germans failed to capture the King and government during the initial phase of the invasion, and was unable to reach a similar solution as in Denmark. Disappointed by this failure, Hitler appointed Josef Terboven as *Reichskommissar* and assigned him the task of forming a collaborationist government in Norway. Terboven worked hard to include members of the political elite, in order to make the body appear as legitimate as possible. However, Hitler's insistence that Quisling and his party should have the upper hand in the new body ultimately undermined the efforts to include members of the traditional elite.⁴

On 25 September 1940, Terboven banned all political parties except *Nasjonal Samling* and declared that henceforth Norwegian independence could only be realized through Quisling's party. In addition, he appointed thirteen 'commissary ministers', the majority of whom were members of *Nasjonal Samling* and loyal to Quisling.⁵ Later, in February 1942, Quisling was himself appointed 'Ministerpresident', or head of the

1996), pp. 287–307; Tom Kristiansen, 'A German Menace to Norway: The Evolution of Threat Perceptions and Strategy Between the Wars', in Michael H. Clemmesen and Marcus S. Faulkner, *Northern European Overture to War, 1939–1941. From Memel to Barbarossa* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 280–3.

² E.g. Ole Kristian Grimnes, *Overfall* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1984).

³ Hans-Dietrich Loock, 'Zur "Großgermanischen Politik" des Dritten Reiches, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1/1960.

⁴ E.g. Magne Skodvin, *Striden om okkupasjonsstyret i Norge fram til 25. september 1940* (Oslo: Det norske samlaget, 1956).

⁵ Hans Fredrik Dahl, *Vidkun Quisling. En fører for fall* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1992), pp. 150–61.

collaboration government. Yet the actual control of the civil administration was retained by Terboven and his *Reichskommissariat* throughout the occupation, whereas the military realm remained the prerogative of the Wehrmacht.⁶ The third German agency to play a key role in occupied Norway was the SS and police apparatus, which was involved in various activities, including the recruitment of Norwegians into its armed branch, the Waffen-SS.⁷

Waffen-SS Recruitment in the 'Germanic Lands'

During the Second World War the Waffen-SS went through a tremendous expansion. This was made possible only by the extensive recruitment of non-German citizens. In fact, the latter group gradually came to constitute the majority of the personnel, turning the Waffen-SS into what is arguably the 'largest and most diverse multinational fighting force ever assembled'.⁸ Contrary to common assumptions, the recruitment of non-Germans had, at least originally, nothing to do with the need for cannon fodder for the frontlines. It is also misleading to explain it as a mere byproduct of manpower needs and Germany's conquests in Western and Northern Europe in 1940. Indeed, the admission of non-Germans predates the outbreak of the Second World War and must, at least during the initial phase, predominantly be understood as a logical consequence of Himmler's racial policies. However, the organized recruitment of foreigners was also increasingly shaped by power-political concerns.⁹

Himmler's SS professed a particularly radical version of National Socialism, in which *race*, not *nationality*, was the key concept. According to the racial tenets of the SS, the average component of 'Nordic blood'

⁶ E.g. Arnim Lang, 'Wehrmachtbefehlshaber und Machtstruktur der deutschen Okkupationsherrschaft in Norwegen', in Robert Bohn et al. (eds), *Neutralität und totalitäre Aggression. Nordeuropa und die Großmächte im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), p. 177.

⁷ For the plans and policies of Himmler and his SS in Nazi-occupied Norway, see Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott, *Himmlers Norge. Nordmenn i det storgermanske prosjekt* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2012).

⁸ Mark P. Gingerich, 'Waffen-SS Recruitment in the "Germanic Lands", 1940–1941', *The Historian* 59 (4) 1997, 815.

⁹ Bernd Wegner, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten. Die Waffen-SS 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1982), pp. 310–13; 'Auf dem Wege zur pangermanischen Armee. Dokumente zur Entstehungsgeschichte des III. ("germanischen") SS-Panzerkorps', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 2 (1980), p. 102. More recently, Mark P. Gingerich has called for an even stronger emphasis on racial ideology: Mark P. Gingerich, *Toward a Brotherhood of Arms: Waffen-SS Recruitment of Germanic Volunteers*, PhD Thesis in history, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991; 'Waffen-SS Recruitment in the "Germanic Lands", 1940–1941', *The Historian* 59 (4), 1997.

was at least as high among some other 'Germanic tribes' as among the Germans themselves, and the national boundaries that separated these peoples were considered artificial. In Himmler's mind, the unification of these countries into a new National Socialist state formation, the so-called 'Greater Germanic Reich', represented the fulfilment of historical destiny. On this background, and since the SS perceived itself as the elite order of the National Socialist movement and the chief protector of the 'Germanic' or 'Nordic' race, it was only logical to admit non-Germans into the organization. This was also seen as a way to further the vision of the Germanic Reich, as the foreign members could serve as the vanguard of this idea in their own countries.¹⁰

Although 'Germanic volunteers' were admitted into the armed SS from 1938, organized and systematic recruitment did not ensue until after the military campaigns in Western Europe in 1940. By this stage, if not before, the SS leaders had become aware of the potential power-political merits of foreign recruitment. One of Himmler's main strategies for extending the power and influence of the SS was to pursue all opportunities to expand the organization's military branch. Since the Wehrmacht laid claim to the majority of each cohort of German conscripts, the *Reichsführung-SS* was increasingly inclined to seek alternative manpower sources beyond Germany's borders. With the occupations of Denmark, Flanders, the Netherlands and Norway, the SS immediately gained Hitler's permission to initiate volunteer recruitment in these countries. This way the SS leaders hoped not only to raise new military divisions but also to project its political and ideological influence into these so-called 'Germanic lands'.¹¹

Initially, Himmler's numerical ambitions were limited. The evidence suggests that the SS sought to recruit a rather small and select group of volunteers from each country, based on the same strict admission requirements that had to be met by German applicants. Through their service in the *Waffen-SS*, these men were to be moulded into committed, loyal and hardened 'political soldiers'. Apparently, the idea of the *Reichsführung-SS* was that the volunteers, following their discharge, would form new national elites and take up central positions in the security apparatus and other key institutions in their home countries. This, in turn, would further the Nazification of the occupied Germanic territories and facilitate their smooth absorption into the coming Reich, while simultaneously boosting the particular influence of the SS.¹²

¹⁰ Gingerich, *Brotherhood*, pp. 39, 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74–8, 100–5.

¹² Gingerich, 'Waffen-SS Recruitment', p. 819; *ibid.*, pp. 93–4; Sørli, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 46–7.

Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 formed a new basis for the recruitment of non-Germans. In the following days and weeks, volunteer formations from several neutral and German-occupied countries across Europe were set up to take part in the military campaign. As soon as Hitler, who acknowledged the propaganda value of such units, had approved the idea, Himmler ensured that the SS was assigned the task of administering units set up in countries defined as Germanic. In previous research on the *Waffen-SS*, there has been a tendency to assume that these so-called Germanic legions were initiated by the Germans.¹³ In reality, the initiative seems to have come from pro-German parties and factions in neutral and occupied countries.¹⁴ Although the Germanic legions became more or less completely incorporated into Himmler's organization, they were never considered regular units of the *Waffen-SS*. The personnel did not have to meet the strict admission requirements of the SS, and did not automatically qualify for membership in the 'Black Corps'. The above developments implied that the strategy of recruiting a small and select group directly into the SS was supplemented by parallel efforts to channel larger numbers of volunteers into the less exclusive but more popular legions, with the aim of winning broader segments of the population for the 'SS idea'. In 1943 the *Reichsführung-SS* tried to bridge these two strategies by dissolving the legions and establishing the III ('germanisches') SS-Panzerkorps. The intention was to bring together all Germanic volunteers in the new corps.¹⁵

Quisling and *Nasjonal Samling*: Ends and Means

From the outset, the SS sought to implement its recruitment scheme in cooperation with collaborationist circles in the occupied Germanic countries.¹⁶ In Norway, the support had to be provided by Vidkun Quisling and *Nasjonal Samling*.

Quisling proved more than willing to promote and facilitate the recruitment of Norwegians into Germany's armed forces. The Norwegian fascist leader undoubtedly wanted Germany to win the war, and he was a firm believer in the idea of Nordic-Germanic racial unification.¹⁷ However, like most other collaborators in Nazi-occupied Europe, Quisling and

¹³ E.g. Georg H. Stein, *The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 152–3; Wegner, 'Auf dem Wege', p. 104.

¹⁴ Sørli, *Solkors eller hakekors*, p. 49.

¹⁵ Wegner, 'Auf dem Wege', pp. 103–5, 108–10; Gingerich, *Brotherhood*, pp. 171–211.

¹⁶ Gingerich, *Brotherhood*, pp. 83, 187.

¹⁷ Hans Fredrik Dahl, *Vidkun Quisling. En fører blir til* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1991), pp. 152–5, 158.

his party also pursued their own nationalistic aims and power-political interests. Since its foundation in the early 1930s, *Nasjonal Samling* had persistently claimed that the Norwegian nation faced a deep moral, political and genetic crisis, and that the only solution was the forming of a national unity government, followed by the immediate implementation of a radical program for national regeneration.¹⁸ After Terboven's declaration on 25 September 1940, Quisling hoped to put his political ideas into life. His aims were to regain the country's independence, to ensure the realization of the party's vision of national regeneration, and to lead Norway, which was to be tied to Germany and other Germanic countries through some sort of federative arrangement, into a new and glorious era.¹⁹

At least initially, Quisling seems to have been quite confident that his vision was fully compatible with Hitler's idea of 'the new Europe'. He was even convinced that Hitler had promised him and his party a swift takeover in Norway. In order to make sure that the alleged promise was kept, Quisling considered the display of loyalty towards the German ally to be of critical importance. His willingness to support the recruitment scheme must primarily be understood against this background: no act of loyalty was assumed to impress Hitler and the German decision-makers as much as military support in the ongoing life-and-death struggle against the enemies of National Socialism. By offering the Germans a significant number of Norwegians to fight in or alongside their armed forces, Quisling wanted to prove absolute loyalty towards Germany and Hitler, thereby maximizing the probability that he would be appointed head of state and that Norway, in the long term, would be granted the greatest possible independence within the confines of German European hegemony.²⁰

Other factors may also help to explain the favourable attitude of Quisling and *Nasjonal Samling* toward military collaboration. First, it was seen as a promising way to restore Norway's armed forces, which had been dissolved by the German occupier. Members of *Nasjonal Samling* tended to consider national independence and restoration of the armed forces as two sides of the same coin. The Germans partly justified their military presence with the need to protect Norwegian territory against

¹⁸ Hans Olaf Brevig and Ivo de Figueiredo, *Den norske fascismen. Nasjonal Samling 1933–1940* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 2002), pp. 11–12, 40–1; Øystein Sørensen, *Hitler eller Quisling. Ideologiske brytninger i Nasjonal Samling 1940–1945* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1989), pp. 27–46.

¹⁹ Dahl, *En fører for fall*, pp. 162, 197–200; Sørensen, *Hitler eller Quisling*, pp. 102–12; Sørlic, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 64–5.

²⁰ Sørlic, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 64–5. See also, e.g., Oddvar K. Hoidal, *Quisling: A Study in Treason* (Oslo, 1989), pp. 466, 605.

aggression. If Norway had its own defence force, it was assumed that the German presence could be reduced. Moreover, there was a widespread notion within the party that the right to carry arms was the prime symbol of freedom both for individuals and nations, and that the Norwegian people had been deprived of this right as a consequence of disastrous defence reductions during the interwar years and of the ensuing occupation. When the Germans now allowed the Norwegians to reclaim this right through voluntary military service, it opened the opportunity to build a cadre of competent officers and NCOs. The establishment of 'Norwegian' units could even lead to the re-introduction of a Norwegian defence administration and a military education system. Like other fascist movements, *Nasjonal Samling* also tended to view the armed forces as carriers of particularly noble traditions and values, a tendency that may have been exacerbated by the fact that several prominent members, including Quisling, had military backgrounds.²¹

Second, there were, at times, hopes that military recruitment could help boost *Nasjonal Samling's* popular support, which was considered crucial for several reasons. Genuine national reunification was among the principal aims of the party. Furthermore, there was a common assumption, based on signals from German officials, that *Nasjonal Samling* had to exceed a certain number of members, by some presumed to be 100,000, before Quisling would be invited to form his own government.²²

Finally, *Nasjonal Samling's* military collaboration was also rooted in the party's ideology. In the eyes of Quisling and his supporters, Germany's war was an existential struggle for Norway, the Nordic-Germanic race and Europe. A German defeat would be disastrous. Victory, on the other hand, meant the end of both capitalism and bolshevism and the realization of the long-desired unification and purification of race and nation. Based on these reflections, there was a widespread notion that the Norwegian people were morally obliged to stand by its German ally.

The impact of this moral imperative on *Nasjonal Samling's* military policy should, however, not be overrated: at least until 1942, hardly any of the party's leaders seriously considered the prospects of German defeat, and the Norwegian contribution was in any case considered of mere symbolic value. Together with the concrete arguments put forward by the decision makers, this strongly indicates that power-political considerations were ascribed greater significance than notions of a moral obligation to support Nazi Germany.²³

²¹ Sørli, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 65–6.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²³ *Ibid.*

Military Recruitment Prior to Barbarossa

Only days after the launching of *Unternehmen Weserübung* – the code-name for the invasions of Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940 – the SS leadership issued directives to initiate recruitment operations in the two countries. Later that month Hitler officially approved the setting up of *SS-VT-Standarte Nordland*, a unit designated for Danish and Norwegian volunteers.²⁴ Despite these early initiatives, the organized recruitment of volunteers in Norway did not ensue until January 1941, presumably because the SS decided to postpone such efforts pending a clarification of the political order in the occupied country.²⁵

By January 1941, Quisling had already approached the Germans on the matter. In September 1940, he wrote to Hans-Heinrich Lammers, government minister and head of the Reich Chancellery, requesting whether Norwegians who wanted to could have the ‘opportunity to serve in the German armed forces and enter upon a military career’. Although Quisling’s motives remain obscure, it seems reasonable to relate the enquiry to the ongoing process of dissolving Norway’s armed forces. If the armed forces remained dissolved for a considerable period of time, the country would be bereft of its military competence. This would, in the eyes of Quisling and his followers, effectively undermine the political aims of *Nasjonal Samling*. By suggesting that Norwegian citizens should be offered the opportunity to serve with the Wehrmacht, Quisling was probably hoping to gain two advantages: first, in the short term, to offer employment to members of the officer corps; and, second, in the long term, to build and maintain Norwegian military competence, a crucial precondition for any future restoration of the country’s armed forces.²⁶

Himmler never seems to have welcomed Hitler’s decision to assign Quisling a formal role in the occupation regime in Norway. Nevertheless, following *Reichskommissar* Terboven’s proclamation of the ‘new order’ in late September 1940, the SS was left with no other option than to seek cooperation with *Nasjonal Samling* in its pursuit of Norwegian volunteers to the *Waffen-SS*.²⁷ In early December, Gottlob Berger, the influential head of *SS-Hauptamt*, the SS office responsible for recruitment and education, wrote to inform Himmler that he had been promised 500 volunteers from Norway by mid-January 1941. When Quisling met with representatives of the *SS-Hauptamt* in Berlin a few days later, he

²⁴ Gingerich, *Brotherhood*, pp. 75–7.

²⁵ Sørlic, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 45–6, 66–7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁷ Emberland and Kott, *Himmlers Norge*, pp. 80, 142.

may have presented them with a slightly lower figure. Thus, SS-*Standartenführer* Paul Dahm, who was in charge of the ensuing campaign in Norway, was commissioned with the task of recruiting 200 Norwegians in four weeks. At the Berlin meeting it was also agreed that a prominent SS leader, possibly even Himmler himself, would come to Oslo to swear the volunteers in.²⁸

On 12 January 1941 the campaign was launched. In a radio address Quisling called on 'all nationally minded Norwegians' to join the newly established SS-*Regiment Nordland* to 'fight alongside Hitler and Germany for the Germanic peoples' common cause and for the new Europe'.²⁹ Less than three weeks later, on 30 January, the first group of volunteers, allegedly around 200 men, were sworn in by Himmler at a ceremony in Oslo. In connection with the ceremony, Quisling made clear that he considered the volunteers a means to achieve the end of national independence and greatness. It is not unlikely that such views were inspired by signals from German officials, possibly from representatives of the SS, that the military contribution would be crucial for Norway's future status. Thus, both Gottlob Berger and Himmler later informed Quisling that the national components of the joint Germanic army envisaged after the war would be dimensioned in accordance with the number of volunteers made available to the SS during the conflict.³⁰

The exact number of Norwegians who were enrolled in the Waffen-SS from January to 22 June 1941 is not clear, but it seems likely to have been somewhere between 650 and 800. According to SS statistics, almost 300 of them took part in the opening phase of the Barbarossa campaign. This first group of Norwegian volunteers did not all end up in *Regiment Nordland* as intended, but were instead spread on the various units of SS-*Division Wiking*. This seems to have triggered negative reactions both within the leadership of *Nasjonal Samling* and among the volunteers. The resentment among Norwegians in *Division Wiking* was to be further exacerbated by later events.³¹ Most of these volunteers experienced heavy fighting during the division's advance as part of Army Group South through Ukraine and into the Caucasus in 1941–2, and during the ensuing retreat. It should also be mentioned that these volunteers, compared to the other main groups of Norwegians in the Waffen-SS, were particularly prone to involvement in the crimes of the regime.³²

²⁸ Sørlie, *Solkors eller hakekors*, p. 67.

²⁹ Radio address by Vidkun Quisling, transcription in [the newspaper] *Fritt Folk*, 13.1.1941.

³⁰ Sørlie, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 67–8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 374–85.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 326–45.

The 'Crusade against Bolshevism'

The expectations ran high among the leaders and regular members of *Nasjonal Samling* following Terboven's public declaration of the new political order on 25 September 1940. During the late fall of 1940, the party was on the offensive, experiencing an unprecedented growth in membership and beginning a campaign to Nazify Norway's state institutions and civic society. But enthusiasm soon gave way to caution and concern. German statements and actions gave rise to suspicions that the occupier had no intentions of handing over power to their Norwegian collaborators. The party also struggled to win the support of broad segments of the population, and the pro-British sentiments flourished as never before.³³

Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 triggered a wave of enthusiasm within *Nasjonal Samling*. Quisling saw the annihilation of the Bolshevik regime and the 'winning back of Russia for the European civilization' as a holy mission.³⁴ The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact had been a significant burden for the party, leaving it with no choice but to defend Germany's alliance with the arch enemy and to restrain from anti-Communist rhetoric. Barbarossa revived hopes of increased popular support for the party, as it could once again play on the widespread fear of Communism and the sympathy for Finland following the Winter War of 1939–40. Quisling and other leading party members also viewed the attack as a unique opportunity to achieve significant military-political and even territorial gains.

The first initiative seems not to have been taken by Quisling, but by Finn Sofus Støren, by some referred to as the former's 'unofficial minister of foreign affairs'.³⁵ When informed of the events on 22 June, Støren immediately called Fredrik Prytz, another prominent party member, to discuss the opportunities created by the German attack. One day later, on 23 June, Støren had prepared a memorandum regarding 'Finland's position after 22/6'. Taking as his point of departure that Finland and Norway now had common interests, he called for the immediate creation of a corps of Norwegian volunteers to fight alongside the Finns. This, he thought, would strengthen the prestige of the 'commissary ministers' at the expense of the Norwegian exile government in London.³⁶

³³ Dahl, *En fører for fall*, pp. 206–8, 226–7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³⁵ As an occupied country, Norway had no official minister of foreign affairs. The description of Støren's role is taken from Hans Fredrik Dahl et al. (red.), *Norsk krigsleksikon 1940–1945* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1995), p. 403.

³⁶ Ole Kolsrud, 'Kollaborasjon og imperialism. Quisling-regjeringens "Austrveg"-drøm 1941–1944', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 3/1998, 243–4.

In subsequent memoranda submitted over the next several days, Støren and Prytz argued that the military contribution should be used as a means to fulfil the party's long-desired dream of attaining sovereignty over Northwest Russian territories that had been Norwegian areas of taxation during the Middle Ages.³⁷ In order to achieve the ambitious objective, Støren held that the offer of military assistance had to be accompanied by demands for mandatory areas within the conquered territories, thereby, if approved, supposedly confirming Norway's equal status to Germany. In order to maximize the propaganda effect for the party, the contribution should also be made contingent on the condition that *Nasjonal Samling* remained in charge of the project.³⁸

Although a direct causation cannot be established, it seems likely that Quisling's response to Barbarossa was inspired by Støren's initiative. Already by 24 June, if not before, the party leader had obtained Hitler's approval to create a Norwegian formation for the participation in the 'Crusade against Bolshevism'. Quisling immediately summoned a group of Norwegian officers to discuss his plans for a Norwegian 'volunteer legion to fight in Finland'. To judge from the diary of one of the officers present, Quisling was driven by several different, yet overlapping, motives. At the initial meeting, his prime concern seems to have been how a Norwegian military contribution could facilitate a gradual restoration of the armed forces.³⁹ In a meeting held the subsequent day, he added a further motive: the prospect of territorial gains in Northwest Russia as a result of Germany's expected victory. Along with the great opportunities that supposedly would arise as a result of Norway's military contribution, he also drew attention to potentially negative consequences of refraining from taking part. In the latter case Quisling feared that the country could be forced to surrender territory to Finland. He also hinted at a further motive, namely the fear of a Finnish collapse, allegedly the worst of all possible outcomes.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 244–5; Lars Borgersrud, *Like gode nordmenn? Den norske militærfascismens historie II* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2012), pp. 408–11. Among others, Støren continued to elaborate on the issue of what was going to happen with Northwest Russia when the Soviet Union was defeated, and there is no doubt that Quisling thought along similar lines: Emberland and Kott, *Himmels Norge*, pp. 330–9; Borgersrud, *Like gode nordmenn?*, pp. 411–16.

³⁹ Finn Kjelstrup's diary, entry for 24 June 1941, RA [The Norwegian National Archives], PA-1506/G/L0003/0005.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, entry for 25 June 1941.

The Norwegian Legion

Over the subsequent days and weeks, *Nasjonal Samling*, in cooperation with sympathizing segments of the officer corps, developed ambitious schemes for a Norwegian legion that was to take part in the Barbarossa campaign, but also more long-term plans for the reconstruction of the country's armed forces. According to a post-war statement by the Nazi Minister of Justice, Sverre Riisnæs, Quisling was hoping to send 30,000 Norwegian volunteers to the 'Finnish front'.⁴¹

Regardless of the reliability of such claims, primary sources show that the initial plans were rather modest. The objective was to raise one brigade consisting of seven battalions and organized according to the former regimental districts, presumably reflecting the ambition to restore the old regimental system.⁴² The new unit was to be placed under the command of the retired major Finn H. Kjelstrup, who was already in charge of the so-called Civil Administration of the Army and Navy – the remnants of the former Norwegian Ministry of Defence. Kjelstrup's first task was to organize the setting up of the legion by help of a military staff in Oslo. It seems reasonable to assume that this 'legion staff' was intended as the nucleus of a future Norwegian general staff.⁴³

The main challenge facing Quisling and his associates was to recruit qualified officers and suitable regular personnel for the new unit. Since it was assumed that the war would be decided within weeks, things had to move quickly. Apparently, the idea was to provide qualified officers through the smooth cooperation between the Norwegian labour service (AT) and the abovementioned Civil Administration of the Army and Navy. Following the dissolution of the armed forces, many officers had been transferred to the labour service, which bore strong resemblance to the German *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. The Civil Administration of the Army and Navy had, on the other hand, assumed some of the responsibilities of the former Ministry of Defence, and it was presumed that the institution possessed the legal authority to order Norwegian officers on duty. The labour service was also assigned a key role in the recruitment of regular personnel. Initially, its apparatus could be used to organize and invigorate voluntary enlistment, whereas in the long term it provided a basis for

⁴¹ See, e.g., Borgersrud, *Like gode nordmenn?*, p. 418.

⁴² Finn Kjelstrup's diary, entries for 24 June and 25 June 1941, RA, PA-1506/G/L0003/0005; 'Den norske legionsstab 1941. Utførlig redegjørelse for opprettelse, virksomhet og oppløsning', RA, PA-1506/G/L0003/0002; *ibid.*, pp. 418–20.

⁴³ E.g. Borgersrud, *Like gode nordmenn?*, p. 420.

the reintroduction of mass conscription.⁴⁴ In order to achieve the desired response, it was decided that the legion should appear unpolitical.⁴⁵

As Støren had stressed in his second memorandum, it was of utmost importance for *Nasjonal Samling* to remain in charge of the project. Hence, from the outset, the German agencies received several demands from the Norwegians: the unit was to be set up and trained on Norwegian soil and according to Norwegian guidelines. Moreover, it should be deployed alongside Finnish forces as a closed unit under Norwegian control. Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, Kjelstrup, the Chief of Staff, worked tirelessly to promote what he and other adherents of *Nasjonal Samling* perceived as 'Norwegian interests'. In addition to the above demands, he also contended in favour of the formation of a 'national government' and the signing of a peace treaty between Germany and Norway, arguing that this would be crucial in boosting the recruitment campaign.⁴⁶

On 29 June 1941, the Norwegian Legion was proclaimed in a radio address by *Reichskommissar* Terboven. According to the proclamation, Germany had been subjected to military pressure from the Soviet regime which demanded a free hand in Finland. However, Hitler had categorically rejected this attack against 'the Nordic states and their culture' and taken it upon himself to ensure the 'definite annihilation' of Bolshevism. Terboven went on to claim that there had been a flood of requests since the campaign started from Norwegians who prayed that their nation was allowed to take part in this historic conflict. Hitler had fulfilled the wish of the Norwegian people and approved the formation of a Norwegian legion. Terboven's speech left the impression that most of *Nasjonal Samling's* demands would be met by the Germans. Thus, the proclamation stated that the Norwegian Legion would be trained and deployed as a 'unit and in closed formation under Norwegian leadership and according to Norwegian guidelines!'⁴⁷

Terboven's proclamation marked the beginning of an intensive recruitment campaign. Along with anti-Soviet and anti-Communist paroles, the project's national significance and profile was a recurrent theme in the propaganda. Norwegian newspapers claimed that the legion was crucial to 'our country's future protection from the red peril' and an important 'contribution to our country's honour and future'.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 417–19.

⁴⁵ Finn Kjelstrup's diary, entry for 24 June 1941, RA, PA-1506/G/L0003/0005.

⁴⁶ Sørli, *Solkors eller hakekors*, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Radio address by Josef Terboven, transcription in [the newspaper] *Aftenposten*, 30 June 1941.

Moreover, it was 'an important stepping stone on the road to restoring Norway's freedom and independence'. Some newspaper articles also emphasized that the new unit was envisaged as the nucleus of a future Norwegian army. The fact that hundreds of officers and NCOs from Norway's now dissolved armed forces took part in a petition calling on people to join the legion conveyed a similar message. Finally, the media restated Terboven's claim that it would be trained and deployed as a closed formation and according to Norwegian guidelines and remain under national control. Some newspapers even informed their readers that the unit would be equipped with Norwegian uniforms, insignia and national symbols.⁴⁸

Finland also featured prominently in the propaganda, reflecting the decision makers' deliberate efforts to take advantage of the rife sympathy with the Finns following the Winter War of 1939–40. Whereas the leaders of *Nasjonal Samling* remained loyal to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact during the Winter War, trying to divert attention away from the conflict, the tone changed sharply after Germany's attack in June 1941. Now it was repeatedly stressed that the Norwegian Legion would be deployed on Finnish soil to fight for Finland's freedom and independence. Newspapers brought appeals by Norwegian veterans of the Winter War for enlistment in the legion, and Norwegian and Finnish symbols featured abreast in press articles, on posters, and at public rallies. The Finnish consul in Norway was even present at a mass rally in Oslo on 4 July 1941, an act that may have deceived some to believe that the Finnish authorities were actively involved in the project.⁴⁹

Why Norwegians Volunteered

The registration, calling up, and examination of volunteers commenced already on 30 June, the day after Terboven's proclamation, and was organized through the medium of the conscription apparatus of the labour service. The system was later complemented by a district organization with recruitment centres in five Norwegian cities.⁵⁰ In comparison to January, the influx of volunteers was considerable. By mid-August more than 1,700 volunteers were registered, but only about 800 of these had been

⁴⁸ Sørli, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 102–3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁵⁰ 'Den norske legionsstab 1941. Utførlig redegjørelse for opprettelse, virksomhet og oppløsning', RA, PA-1506/G/L0003/0002, p. 4; Promemoria, November 1941, RA/PA-0773/Y/Yb/L0012/'Korrespondanse 1941–42.'

examined and accepted.⁵¹ Why did they choose to join the new volunteer unit in order to take part in Nazi Germany's campaign in the East?

When addressing this question after 1945, Norwegian veterans of the Waffen-SS have tended to stress their political-ideological motives. Above all they have referred to the desire to fight Communism and the Soviet Union, sympathies for neighbouring Finland, and the conviction that some sort of military contribution to Germany's war effort was crucial for Norway's future independence.⁵² Until recently, this explanation has hardly been put under critical scrutiny by Norwegian historians, and particularly the first of the above reasons, the desire to fight Communism and the Soviet Union, has been widely accepted as the prime cause of enlistment.⁵³

International experts of the Waffen-SS have, on the other hand, been strikingly reluctant to accept the claim that Western European volunteers were primarily driven by political-ideological motives. Georg H. Stein, author of the first major scholarly monograph on the Waffen-SS, published in 1966, acknowledged that some of the 'Germanic' volunteers had probably enlisted 'to save Europe, or at least their homelands, from "Bolshevism"', but concluded that this was 'almost certainly not [true] of the majority'.⁵⁴ To the extent that they ever had a 'strong idealistic conviction concerning the need for saving Europe from the onslaught of "Red Imperialism"', they acquired it after their enlistment in the SS', Stein claimed. Heinz Höhne drew similar conclusions in his comprehensive book on the SS published the same year, stating that '[p]olitical ideas were decisive only for a minority'.⁵⁵ According to Stein and Höhne, most volunteers enlisted for reasons such as a desire for adventure, prospects of prestige, careerism, boredom and material benefit.⁵⁶ At least to some extent, this view has later been maintained by other scholars.⁵⁷

⁵¹ 'Den norske legionsstab 1941. Utførlig redegjørelse for opprettelse, virksomhet og oppløsning', RA, PA-1506/G/L0003/0002, p. 17.

⁵² Sørle, *Solkors eller hakekors*, p. 89.

⁵³ See Sigurd Sørle, 'From Misguided Idealists to *Genocidaires*: The Waffen-SS Volunteers in Norwegian Memory Culture', in Arnd Bauerkämper et al. (eds.), *From Patriotic Memory to a Universalistic Narrative? Shifts in Norwegian Memory Culture after 1945 in Comparative Perspective* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2014).

⁵⁴ Georg H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 139–41.

⁵⁵ Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head. The Story of Hitler's SS* (Hamburg, 1966, here: London, 1980), p. 459.

⁵⁶ Stein, *The Waffen-SS*, p. 142; *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Philip Henry Buss, *The Non-Germans in the German Armed Forces 1939–1945*, PhD thesis in history (University of Kent at Canterbury, 1974), p. 212; Kenneth Estes, *A European Anabasis – Western European Volunteers in the German Army and SS, 1940–1945* (Solihull, 2015), pp. 178, 189.

There are good reasons to question the validity of these conclusions, at least when considering the volunteers to the Norwegian Legion. In fact, there is no doubt that political-ideological motives were crucial. During the summer and fall of 1941, the Germans and *Nasjonal Samling* relied almost exclusively on political-ideological arguments in their efforts to convince Norwegians to enlist. There were hardly any promises of material gains or improved career opportunities for the volunteers and their families. More importantly, whenever the issue of motive is touched upon in primary sources, political-ideological considerations are completely dominant.⁵⁸

Furthermore, there is no doubt that the motives emphasized by the volunteers after the war – anti-Communism, sympathy for Finland, and the desire to regain Norway's independence – were of significance to most legionnaires. As already noted above, all three issues formed central themes in the propaganda from the summer of 1941. In addition, they feature prominently among the motives mentioned by legionnaires in contemporary interviews, letters and diaries.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, it would be a misconception to argue that the volunteers were simply driven by anti-Communism, nationalism, and sympathies for Finland. In most cases such attitudes merely constituted elements of a more comprehensive sympathy for *Nasjonal Samling*, Nazi Germany, and National Socialist ideology. Whereas a clear majority of Norwegians probably shared the antipathy against the Soviet Union, the wish to regain Norway's independence, and the sympathy for Finland, less than 0.2 per cent of the population chose to join Nazi Germany's armed forces. The reason was simple: an overwhelming majority of the Norwegians despised Hitler, Quisling and the occupier, and considered enlistment in German units as tantamount to treason. With few exceptions, only those who already sympathized with *Nasjonal Samling* viewed enlistment as an option. This is reflected in the membership ratio among the volunteers: whereas less than 2 per cent of the total population joined the ranks of *Nasjonal Samling* during the occupation, studies suggests that at least 80 per cent of the volunteers were members of the party. Of these, only a tiny minority joined after the date of enlistment. It seems plausible to argue that those who joined the Norwegian Legion in the summer and fall of 1941 tended to be more heterogeneous in ideological terms than those who had volunteered during the preceding months. Yet the indications are that some sort of sympathy for *Nasjonal*

⁵⁸ Sørle, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 100–13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–7.

Samling and its National Socialist ideology normally constituted a necessary prerequisite for enlistment even during this period.⁶⁰

Although political-ideological motives were necessary prerequisites for enlistment in most cases, the significance of non-ideological factors should not be underrated. In fact, it seems highly likely that the decision to enlist tended to be the product of a complex interplay between ideological and non-ideological factors. Social pressure from the party and from friends and relatives surely had a considerable effect upon many, and a desire for adventure is always a strong impetus for military volunteers. In addition, if Barbarossa had turned out successfully and Norway had remained under Nazi rule, there is every reason to assume that participation in the decisive 'crusade against Bolshevism' would have been career-enhancing and highly prestigious. For those who had wanted to pursue a military career, participation in the campaign would have been indispensable.⁶¹

However, ideological and non-ideological factors were intimately connected. Thus, members and sympathizers of *Nasjonal Samling* were more likely than others to be tempted by offers of material gains and career opportunities. Moreover, as a general rule, mechanisms of social pressure to enlist had no impact on individuals outside the National Socialist fringe. Those who did not sympathize with *Nasjonal Samling* were also far less inclined to believe that Germany would win the war.⁶²

Setbacks

On the face of it, the initial phase of the recruitment campaign during the summer of 1941 could appear quite successful. In the first instance the influx of volunteers significantly exceeded that of the preceding period. Beyond that the previously mentioned petitions indicated that the project was perceived with sympathy among many former officers and NCOs. However, even if the campaign gained more volunteers than at any point before or after, the response was nowhere near the high expectations of the leaders of *Nasjonal Samling*. In fact, only one out of the seven planned battalions materialized, the so-called *Bataljon Viken*, and even this unit suffered from a chronic manpower shortage following its deployment to the front in February 1942.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–10.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–17.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 394–6.

Almost from the outset, Quisling and his associates also had to deal with other setbacks, some of which, in turn, may have had a damaging effect on further recruitment. As already indicated above, German officials initially left the impression that the demands of *Nasjonal Samling* would be respected. However, it soon became apparent that the SS had other intentions. The ambition to turn the volunteers into adherents of the SS and its ideology made Himmler and his subordinates inclined to reduce *Nasjonal Samling's* influence over the project. In addition, several of the Norwegian demands were difficult to meet for legal and practical reasons, and the Germans remained generally suspicious of all plans and actions that could be interpreted as signs of attempts at Norwegian military restoration.⁶⁴

During the course of the summer and fall of 1941, the agreed conditions were, one by one, set aside by the SS: the unit was not trained on Norwegian soil and according to Norwegian guidelines, but transferred to Germany and *de facto* incorporated into the Waffen-SS. Having been transferred to Germany, the personnel was equipped with German uniforms and insignia, required to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler, and forced to accept that the time-limited contracts that had been signed before leaving Norway were set aside. In December, the legion staff, which had long since been deprived of any real authority, was dissolved. Finally, in February 1942, the legion was deployed to the front south of Leningrad, not to the Finnish front as originally claimed.⁶⁵

Within *Nasjonal Samling* these developments were perceived as breeches of the agreed conditions, and prominent party officials became increasingly concerned that the Germans merely intended to exploit their Norwegian partner. However, Quisling himself seems to have accepted the changes without considerable protest. This, of course, reflected the asymmetrical relations between the occupiers and *Nasjonal Samling*. The party's power rested solely on German complicity and there were reasons to fear that persistence on these issues could damage Quisling's standing in the eyes of Hitler. Even those who wanted Quisling to be more assertive were worried that taking a hard line could make the Germans dissolve the legion. Quisling's firm conviction that Hitler ultimately would honour his promises regarding Norway's independence as long as *Nasjonal Samling* acted as a loyal ally also explains why the former did not react more vehemently to the changes. Indeed, when Germany made certain concessions it helped to justify Quisling's staunch faith and conviction. For example, in the late autumn of 1941 Himmler decreed

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 71–2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

that the Norwegian Legion, unlike the other Germanic legions, could have its own replacement unit on home soil. Moreover, as already mentioned, Quisling was appointed formal head of the Norwegian government in February 1942, igniting hopes of an imminent dissolution of the *Reichskommissariat*.⁶⁶

Disillusionment

While the party leaders ultimately had no other choice than to put up with the situation, the many changes to the agreed conditions caused conflicts, resentment, and disillusionment among the legionnaires.

On 12 July the first volunteers to the Norwegian Legion arrived in Oslo, where they were quartered in a school building. An early warning of the German intentions came already during this short stay in the capital. Rather than the Norwegian uniforms they had been promised in the propaganda, the volunteers were dressed in Waffen-SS uniforms with German insignia. Although some have later claimed that they removed the German insignia from their uniforms, primary sources contain no evidence of this issue.⁶⁷

The first serious tensions arose while the unit was stationed in a military camp on the outskirts of Drammen, approximately 40 km southwest of Oslo. On 29 July, about a week after the first legionnaires arrived in the camp, the men were curfewed before being informed that they would soon be transferred by sea to another training camp, probably in Germany. The Norwegian officers also presented the regular personnel with contracts according to which each individual was committed to serve for a minimum of six months, of which at least five months was to be abroad. Many volunteers were reluctant to sign the contracts, but ultimately succumbed to the officers' persuasion. On 30 July it was announced that the troops would embark on a ship destined for Germany the same day. Such a transfer implied a blatant violation of the original conditions, as the training was supposed to take place on Norwegian soil, and caused fierce reactions. Allegedly, many legionnaires now seriously contemplated leaving the legion, but were privately informed by the officers that such a move would have 'grave consequences'.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–3.

⁶⁷ For the claim that German insignia were removed from the uniforms, see Svein Blindheim, *Nordmenn under Hitlers fane. Dei norske frontkjemparane* (Oslo: Noregs boklag, 1977), p. 37. Regarding the absence of any mentioning of such incidents in contemporary sources, see i.e. written account by Ole S., 7 July 1943, HL [Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities, Oslo], WSS, P31, box 1, file 0007. See also *ibid.*, p. 386.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 386–7.



Figure 12.1 Jørgen Bakke, the Viken Battalion commander, giving a speech at the Fallingbostel training camp in October 1941. Hans Jüttner, head of SS-FHA (second from left), Vidkun Quisling (second from right) and Paul Wegener of the German Reichskommissariat in Norway (on the far right).

Following the arrival of the legion in Fallingbostel, a training camp south of Hamburg, officers of the Waffen-SS took charge of the training which was conducted according to German regulations. Jørgen Bakke, a former Norwegian army captain who had been appointed commander of the *Bataljon Viken*, soon realized that several of *Nasjonal Samling's* original conditions were unrealistic, and as the legion staff in Oslo was gradually sidelined by the SS, the demands for Norwegian uniforms, equipment and training regulations were abandoned step by step. Discontent kept smouldering beneath the surface and was stimulated further by widespread dissatisfaction with the behaviour of the officers and NCOs. Even if there are good reasons to assume that these developments produced resentment among many legionnaires, the evidence indicates that the majority adopted a waiting position, probably suggesting that their chief concern was that the unit was made ready for front service as soon as possible.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

In September, tensions intensified as the legionnaires were informed that they had to swear an oath to Adolf Hitler. Although most of the Norwegians harboured sympathies for Hitler and National Socialism, they remained reluctant to swear an oath to him. According to one legionnaire, this was based on the reasoning that Norway was still, 'formally', at war with Germany and that by swearing an oath to Germany's head of state, they could, 'with some formal right', be accused of treason. Hence, the act was not merely a 'formal' crime, but could be utilized for propaganda purposes by the Norwegian government in exile. Despite the reluctance, only a handful of the legionnaires ultimately refused to swear the oath. The rest once again gave in to pressure and outright threats from their superiors.⁷⁰

During the same period, uncertainty also arose as to whether the contracts were still in force. The SS had never approved the time-limited contracts signed just before departure from Norway, and with no end in sight to the campaign in the east, the *SS-Führungshauptamt* insisted that the volunteers had to commit themselves for the entirety of the war. At a meeting in Berlin on 26 September, *SS-Gruppenführer* Hans Jüttner, head of the *SS-Führungshauptamt*, ordered Jørgen Bakke to convey this unpopular message to the legionnaires prior to the swearing-in ceremony. For some reason, Bakke failed to inform his subordinates that the time-limitation clause had been annulled. When the information gradually came out, it caused a wave of discontent, which culminated in early December. Most of the legionnaires saw themselves as victims of a series of broken promises by the Germans, and the message that the time limitation had been annulled was the straw that broke the camel's back. The event coincided with Bakke's removal as battalion commander, an incident that led to fears that the Germans intended to seize complete control of the project or maybe even dissolve the legion and distribute the volunteers among various SS units. Uncertainty regarding how soon the legion could be deployed to the front seems to have added to the frustrations, which were directed at the Germans and the SS, but also at the staff headquarters in Oslo, *Nasjonal Samling* and even Quisling himself.⁷¹

In order to bring the discontent and tensions to an end, the German administration and leading Norwegian officers took joint action. On 15 December, the highest-ranking Norwegian officer, Leg.- *Hauptsturmführer* Ragnar Berg, gave a speech to the legionnaires, with the intention of removing all doubts regarding the legion's future, to clarify the conditions

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 387–8.

of service, and to stem the flow of rumours circulating among the men.⁷² In his speech Berg rejected that the SS intended to appoint a German commander or to dissolve the legion, and claimed that Bakke's removal had been carried out in total agreement with Quisling. He then gave a relatively detailed account of the provisions that would apply to the unit and its personnel from now on. Berg also sought to explain the modifications and changes to the original conditions. Since the decision to form the legion had been made almost overnight, he said, no formal agreement existed regarding the conditions of service when Terboven proclaimed the new unit last June. Thus, Terboven's statement that the legion would be formed 'according to Norwegian regulations and under Norwegian leadership' should merely be understood as 'an expression of his wishes and hopes'.⁷³ Furthermore, Berg argued in favour of the need to accept German regulations, uniforms and administration. Finally, he turned to the most controversial issue: the time of service. He explained that the initial time-limitation clause had been included simply because, during the summer of 1941, everyone expected the war to be short-lived and that Bakke, before the swearing-in ceremony, had been ordered to inform his men that this specific provision was invalidated. All other terms of the contract, Berg maintained, would remain in full force.⁷⁴

At least in the short term, the indications are that the speech helped soothe the discontent. Nevertheless, even though everyone now knew that the time limitation had been annulled, there is much evidence to suggest that many still expected to serve only a short period at the front. Yet before they arrived, further disappointments arose. While on the way to the front, the men were informed that they would not be deployed to the Finnish front, but to the area south of Leningrad. The reason for this change of plans seems to have been the logistical difficulties faced by the Wehrmacht at the time, leading the OKW to suggest that the legion be incorporated into Army Group North until the situation made a transfer to Finland feasible. Ever since the unit was proclaimed in June, it had been stressed time and again that it would fight alongside Finnish forces at the Finnish front, and there is every indication that many legionnaires had decided to volunteer partly for this reason. Some of the men were furious when informed that they were on their way to the Leningrad front, but the majority, it seems, reacted relatively calmly to the news. One possible explanation is that many were simply relieved to finally be

⁷² SS-Hauptsturmführer Rahn to SS-FHA, 20 December 1941, VHA [Vojenský historický archiv, Prague], FLN [Freiwilligenlegion Norwegen], box 2, file 9.

⁷³ Speech by Leg.-Hauptsturmführer Berg, 15 December 1941, VHA, FLN, box 2, file 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

reaching the front. Besides, the legionnaires soon faced other and more immediate concerns.⁷⁵

The Norwegian Legion was never transferred to the Finnish front. Instead, the unit took part in the ruthless siege of Leningrad from February 1942 until its withdrawal from the front in February/March 1943. During the entire period, the unit was characterized by resentment and disillusionment, leading to desertions, self-mutilations and frequent discharges.⁷⁶ When the legion was withdrawn from the front in 1943, Himmler personally travelled to Jelgava (Mitau) in Latvia in order to convince the remaining Norwegians to continue their service in the Waffen-SS. However, despite significant efforts to soften the group, a clear majority chose to be discharged.⁷⁷

Quisling's Shattered Dreams

Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union triggered tremendous enthusiasm within *Nasjonal Samling*. In the eyes of Quisling and his associates, this was the final struggle between good and evil, and few of them considered defeat a possibility. They were on the threshold to the realization of their grand visions: not only would they soon be able to form a proper government, but Norway would regain its independence and its armed forces, and there were even prospects of Norwegians taking part in the future colonization of Russia. All these dreams were to be realized by the participation of Norwegians in the Barbarossa campaign.

However, Quisling's vision was a failure from the outset: the number of Norwegians who were willing to volunteer for the legion turned out to be completely insufficient to realize the initial military plans, let alone the far more ambitious long-term scheme for a restored Norwegian army. Generally speaking, the recruitment propaganda had no appeal outside the limited group of people who already sympathized with *Nasjonal Samling*. Moreover, Quisling and his associates were largely deprived of control over those who actually volunteered. By transferring the legion to Germany, incorporating it into the Waffen-SS, and dissolving the staff in Oslo, Himmler and the SS effectively assumed control over the project. To add to the problems, resentment soon spread among

⁷⁵ Sørli, *Solkors eller hakekors*, p. 389.

⁷⁶ Stellungnahme des Ic der Legion zur Fahnenflucht des Leg.-Schützen W., SS-Obersturmführer Körner, 23 October 1942, VHA, FLN, box 4, file 16; Auszug aus den Akten der Abtl. III der Frw.-Leg. Norwegen, 23 October 1943, FLN, VHA, box 3, file 16; Redieß to Himmler, 17 November 1942, BAB [Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde], NS 19/3451/135. See also: *Ibid.*, pp. 389–396.

⁷⁷ Sørli, *Solkors eller hakekors*, pp. 398–9.

the legionnaires. The resentment was not only directed at the Germans and the SS, but also at Quisling and the party, further undermining the recruitment efforts and even contributing to growing tensions and discontent within the party. During 1942 it became increasingly evident that the political rewards that Quisling and other leaders of *Nasjonal Samling* had been expecting to get in return for the military contribution would not materialize. The visions and dreams that were sparked by the Barbarossa campaign had been utterly shattered, and the party never regained momentum.

Part III

Collaborators from within the Soviet Union

13 The Baltic States: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia

Valdis O. Lumans

Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians shared some common goals for participating in Adolf Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, but others were singular, products of particular circumstances. Some reasons for fighting were of recent origin, dictated by developments leading up to the campaign and then the vagaries of war, while others could be traced to the distant histories of these people and their region. In examining the motives for joining Hitler one is mistaken to regard the Baltic States and their peoples as a heterogeneous entity. Granted, commonalities have often blurred them as one, but enough distinctions, historical, linguistic, cultural, political, and others, have distinguished them to preclude an all-encompassing common denominator. One difference separating them is language. Estonians speak a Finno-Ugric tongue related to Finnish, while Latvians and Lithuanians speak Baltic languages, distinct though similar. Their historic developments also varied. In the early thirteenth century crusading German knights conquered the future territories of Estonia and Latvia. They founded a feudal society in which they constituted a landowning nobility ruling over a repressed Latvian and Estonian peasant majority. With the Reformation the German aristocracy opted for Lutheranism, which also became the denomination for most Estonians and Latvians.

Medieval Lithuanians also encountered the German crusaders, but held their own, even extending their lands from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In the process they associated themselves historically not with the Germans, but with the Poles, gradually assimilating into a joint Lithuanian-Polish state. With time the state became more Polish than Lithuanian. Over the years the Lithuanian nobility became polonized, adopting Polish culture and speech, while the peasants in the countryside retained their Lithuanian ways and language. The Lithuanians along with the Poles remained Roman Catholic. A historical commonality for all three Baltic nationalities has been the misfortune of inhabiting a geopolitical battleground over which neighbouring nations competed – Poles,

Swedes, and above all Germans and Russians, all taking turns governing the native peoples.

In the eighteenth century the Russians emerged as the undisputed masters of the Baltic. Russia ruled the future Estonia and Latvia as the three Baltic provinces, Estland, Livland and Kurland, while the territories to become Lithuania consisted of Vilnius, Kaunas and Suwalki provinces as well as the city of Grdno (Gardinas) and its environs. The Lithuanian provinces belonged to The Pale of Settlement, those western Russian provinces in which Jews were permitted to live, which accounted for the large Jewish populations of Poland, Ukraine, Byelorussia (White Russia) and Lithuania. Much smaller communities of Jews resided in Latvia and Estonia, whose Baltic provinces stood outside The Pale.¹ The Jewish presence and even more so Baltic peoples' awareness that they lived between two far larger and stronger nations, the Germans and Russians, helped determine the course and nature of their involvement in the Second World War.

By far the most critical events in the histories of the three Baltic peoples were the First World War and the ensuing Russian Revolution, which resulted in independent statehood for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1917–20. Legacies of these events, lessons learned and tempered attitudes would moderate their responses to the conditions and demands of the next war. All three peoples had marched off to war with the Tsarist armies to fight Germany. Then the Russian Revolution brought a new threat, Soviet Communism. Although many Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians joined the Bolsheviks, the majority comprised patriotic nationalists ready to fight both Germans and Russians to win their independence. The ensuing wars of independence entailed complicated alliances and reversals with and against both the Germans and Russians. These experiences reaffirmed that their sovereignty lay in the balance of power between these two neighbouring nations.

Another teaching they absorbed was the art of war. All three carried their combat seasoning into the era of national independence. These veterans provided the nuclei of national armies that became sources of national pride and identity. Although all three peoples had fought both Germans and Russians, the latter, remembered as the Bolsheviks, left a bitter imprint on Baltic soldiers and civilians. All had experienced at least brief periods of Communist repression, which bloodily previewed what they could expect under future Russian rule. Although Germans would be generally perceived as the lesser of two evils, all three did not view the

¹ Robert van Voren, *Undigested Past: The Holocaust in Lithuania* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 7–13.

two antagonists as equally threatening. In one estimate the Estonians were about 75 per cent anti-Russian, Latvians around 50 per cent, and Lithuanians 75 per cent anti-German². Differences can be attributed to relative proximity to the two giant neighbours as well as to certain post-war developments.

The three states emerged from the crucible of war and revolution as sovereign Western-style parliamentary democracies. Democracy, however, did not last long, starting with Lithuania in 1926 when Antanas Smetona and the military introduced an authoritative dictatorship. In Estonia the final blow to democracy came as a coup in March 1934 under the leadership of Konstantin Päts and General Johan Laidoner, and the Latvians followed suit in May 1934 when Kārlis Ulmanis in league with the army also established a dictatorial regime. All three regimes were extremely popular with most patriotic nationalists. Although supported by a majority of their citizens, these authoritarian dictatorships – far from being the brutal regime of National Socialism or even the Fascism of Mussolini's Italy – nonetheless stifled diversity of opinions, stressed obedience, excluded the public from decision making, and kept the people uninformed, asking them to rely on their governments and militaries for their safety. This mentality contributed to the gullibility and passivity of the Baltic public during independence-threatening crises that eventually led to their loss of freedom.³

International developments also influenced the wartime participation of the Baltic States. Estonia's only foreign policy concern was its Soviet neighbour. Consequently Estonian foreign policy usually favoured good relations with distant Germany.⁴ The Latvians entertained no serious grievances, though their relationship with their German minority often complicated dealings with the Reich, especially after the ascent of Hitler.

² Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: University Press, 2009), p. 27. See also David J. Smith, 'Estonia: Independence and European Integration' in David J. Smith, Artis Pabriks, Aldis Purs and Thomas Lane (eds.), *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 154; Thomas Lane, 'Lithuania: Stepping Westward' in Smith, Pabriks, Purs and Lane (eds.), *The Baltic States*, p. 35; Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: The Years of Dependence, 1940–1980: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 13–14; Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: The Years of Independence, 1917–1940* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1974), pp. 171–99.

³ For more on pre-war twentieth-century histories see John Hiden and Patrick Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1991); Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, 'Latvia: The Challenges of Change', in Smith, Pabriks, Purs and Lane, *The Baltic States*.

⁴ For Estonian foreign policy see Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993); relevant sections in Smith; also Weiss-Wendt.

Since memories of Soviet terror in Riga in 1919 still lingered, Latvians viewed Moscow and Berlin as equally dangerous and both in need of placating.⁵

Though Lithuania's nation builders did not contemplate a principality to the Black Sea, they envisioned including all territories with ethnic Lithuanian preponderance. Thus two areas and cities came into question, Klaipeda (Memel) and its immediate environs, the *Memelland*, and first and foremost, Vilnius. Though the population of Vilnius was mostly Polish and Jewish, Lithuanian nationalists cherished it as essential to a resurrected Lithuania, but Poles harboured similar aspirations. The Lithuanians engaged in a triangular struggle against both Bolsheviks and Poles over the city, and in 1920 the Poles resolved the matter by seizing Vilnius, which precluded normal relations with Poland. Lithuanians had to settle for Kaunas as their national capital, clearly a second choice. Similarly Klaipeda, a medieval port city of German origin, with a mostly German population surrounded by an ethnic Lithuanian countryside, obstructed relations with Germany. More important than Klaipeda's ethnicity was its access to the Baltic Sea, the only harbour of any size along the Lithuanian coast. With Germany still weak, in January 1923 the Lithuanians occupied the disputed city, thereby creating grounds for an anti-German foreign policy.⁶

While Germany and the Soviet Union were recovering from war and chaos, the three Baltic States relied upon the League of Nations system and the Western powers as guarantors of their freedom. But with the resurgence of their larger neighbours in the 1930s, it became clear that the post-war system could no longer ensure their security. After exhausting numerous diplomatic strategies they gave up on pleasing both Germany and Russia and declared formal neutrality on the Swedish model. They also made a rather feeble attempt at self-defence. In 1923 Estonia and Latvia had formed a defensive alliance, but were reluctant to include Lithuania for fear of entangling themselves in the Vilnius and Klaipeda questions. In September 1934 they finally agreed to admit Lithuania, but on the condition that Vilnius and Klaipeda would be non-issues. In what came to be known as the Baltic Entente the three made no provisions for military coordination, much less action.⁷

⁵ Valdis O. Lumans, *Latvia in World War II* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) pp. 16–20; Pabriks and Purs, pp. 1–20.

⁶ V. Stanley Vardys and Judith B. Sedaitis, *Lithuania: The Rebel Nation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997) pp. 28–31; See also Lane, pp. 8–9, 33–4; Van Voren, pp. 16–20.

⁷ Smith, p. 154; Lane, p. 35; Lumans, pp. 34–45, 53–6.

On paper the Baltic militaries appeared viable. All three armed forces benefitted from combat-tested leadership. The younger generation of soldiers and junior officers had grown up in nationalistic, militarized environments espousing patriotism and duty to their homelands. Morale was spirited. Latvia, for example, welcomed some 75,000 veterans home from the wars and turned them into a national army of 20,000.⁸ In addition to the official armed forces, which also maintained a system of reserves, there existed a paramilitary organization, *Aizsargi*, the Home Guard. Initially a self-defence force founded during the wars of independence, it comprised some 32–40,000 armed and trained men – many serving double duty in the reserves – available for security and police tasks in emergencies. Well-organized, armed, patriotic, mostly veterans and rural, the *Aizsargi* had helped Kārlis Ulmanis seize power in 1934.⁹ When estimating potential military strength in Latvia, all these forces must be taken into account.

The nature of Estonia's military was similar to Latvia's, a veteran, war-tempered officer cadre and soldiers mostly of rural background steeped in nationalism. In 1939 Estonia's armed forces numbered around 16,000, bolstered by a system of reserves, and just like Latvia maintained a nationwide armed paramilitary force, the *Kaitseliit* (Defence Union). Numbering around 35,000, it was founded during the First World War and recreated in the failed Communist uprising of 1924.¹⁰ Lithuania also maintained a national army of comparable size and nature, though it had been deployed more recently in fighting for Vilnius and the seizure of Klaipėda. Its army could also count on home-grown paramilitary support, but it seems that no single organization matched the national status of the *Aizsargi* and the *Kaitseliit*.¹¹

While the Baltic States delicately preserved their fragile neutrality into the late 1930s, a momentous event rocked the European diplomatic balance, the Nazi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression of 23 August 1939, also known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact or the Hitler-Stalin Treaty. Once announced, it sent seismic shocks across Europe, including the Baltic States: the two inveterate enemies would set aside their differences and pledged friendship and non-aggression. The leaders of the Baltic States were aghast, unable to comprehend this diplomatic monstrosity and could only speculate

⁸ Lumans, pp. 37–8.

⁹ Lumans, pp. 26–7.

¹⁰ Weiss-Wendt, p. 17; Smith, pp. 25–6.

¹¹ Lane, p. 8; Vardys and Sedaitis, pp. 42–3.

where Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania stood relative to this worrisome development.¹²

Since the well-known preliminary events and respective purposes of this agreement lie beyond the scope of this work, we can pick up with the essentials relevant to the Baltic States. Hitler had already seized Klaipeda, or *Memelland*, from Lithuania in March 1939, his final prize in a sequence of diplomatic victories facilitated through intimidation – a humiliating national affront to Smetonas' regime accentuated by Hitler steaming into Klaipeda aboard a German naval cruiser. Among Stalin's many interests served by this treaty was the opportunity to regain territory the Soviet Union had lost during the previous war, an imperative facilitated by a secret clause attached to the treaty delineating spheres of interest. The Soviets claimed Finland, Eastern Poland, Romanian Bessarabia, and two Baltic States, Estonia and Latvia. Germany received most of Poland and Lithuania. In late September the partners readjusted their spheres, Hitler trading Lithuania to Stalin for a larger piece of Poland.¹³

One week later, on 1 September 1939, the Second World War began in Europe with Germany's attack on Poland. Stalin nervously watched Hitler's forces overwhelm Poland and even cross the line of demarcation, and so on 17 September he ordered the Red Army into action, attacking and obliterating Poland from the east. Two days later the Red Army entered Vilnius. Up to this point, except for Lithuania's loss of Klaipeda and its anxieties over Vilnius, the Baltic States had avoided hostilities. Soon enough, however, they would be brought directly into the maelstrom, starting with Estonia but followed closely by Latvia and Lithuania.

On 14 September a disabled Polish submarine, the *Orzel*, entered Tallinn harbour for repairs and a temporary haven. As neutrals, the Estonians dutifully interned the vessel and its crew. In the early morning of 18 September, the day after the Soviets invaded Poland, the Polish sailors overpowered their Estonian guards, and the *Orzel* escaped. Moscow protested the disappearance of the submarine, now a belligerent vessel. While low-flying Soviet aircraft intimidated Tallinn, Moscow accused the Estonians of their unwillingness and inability to enforce neutrality, a situation threatening Soviet security interests. Consequently Foreign Commissar Vyacheslav Molotov demanded the Estonians sign a Mutual Assistance Pact, aligning Estonia diplomatically and militarily with the Soviet Union. Though the Soviets promised not to interfere in

¹² Lumans, pp. 64–7; Loeber, pp. 15–21, 27–9; Smith, pp. 23–4; Lane, pp. 36–8; Weiss-Wendt, p. 28.

¹³ Lumans, pp. 64–7; Loeber, pp. 15–21, 27–9; Rauch, pp. 180–211.

Estonian internal affairs, the Pact provided for stationing some 25,000 Soviet troops in the country. The treaty was signed on 28 September, and Soviet troops duly occupied Estonian military bases.¹⁴ This was the first step in a chain of events that ultimately led to the incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union.

The Soviets turned next toward Latvia, and on 2 October Molotov informed the Latvians that the Soviet Union expected them to follow Estonia's example. Realizing the futility of resistance, Ulmanis yielded, Latvia signed its Mutual Assistance Pact on 5 October, and some 25–30,000 Soviet forces marched into Latvia.¹⁵ Then came Lithuania's turn, as Molotov pressured its envoys to sign pacts similar to those forced on Estonia and Latvia, but sweetening the deal with promises of handing Vilnius – recently taken from Poland – over to Lithuania. The Lithuanians agreed and signed their treaty on 10 October, letting in the Red Army but gaining Vilnius.¹⁶ In all three states the public was told that the Soviets entered as allies and were assured that the Soviets of 1939 were no longer the Bolsheviks of 1919. For a while the Soviets appeared to keep their promises of non-interference.

When the Soviets entered, none of the three Baltic armed forces resisted. A few voices in each regime had counselled resistance, but had been overruled by others. Later, when the Soviets completely occupied these states in June 1940, many looked back to this initial entry as a point when armed opposition might have been possible. After all, when in late November the Soviets attacked Finland for refusing to sign a similar pact, the Finns resisted valiantly and effectively in the Winter War, finally giving up in March 1940 – but they preserved their independence. The Baltic public morally supported the Finns, and if consulted, might have been willing to take a stand against the Soviets. After all, Estonians volunteered by the thousands to help the Finns fight the Russians. During this conflict Baltic statesmen and military leaders resumed dialogue to coordinate actions, but nothing came of it, except providing the Soviets evidence of Baltic plotting.¹⁷

Concurrently with the Baltic regimes signing the treaties with the Soviet Union another development transpired, the resettlement or *Umsiedlung* of their ethnic Baltic German communities. On 6 October Hitler announced that in the interest of removing points of potential

¹⁴ Prit Buttar, *Between Giants: The Battle for the Baltics in World War II* (Oxford: Osprey, 2013), p. 33; Taagepera, pp. 58–60; Rauch, pp. 211–15; Smith, pp. 23–5.

¹⁵ Lumans, pp. 75–81.

¹⁶ Rauch, pp. 212–15; Lane, pp. 36–8; Vardys and Sedaitis, pp. 46–9.

¹⁷ Lumans, pp. 82–3.

friction in Eastern Europe he would relocate ethnic German minorities back to the Reich, beginning with the Baltic Germans of Estonia and Latvia. He knew that as soon as Stalin took over the Baltic States these Germans would clamour for his intervention, and he would be forced to respond, having declared himself the defender of all Germans. And at least for the time being he was reluctant to offend Stalin and undermine their partnership; so the Baltic Germans had to go.¹⁸

As German diplomats negotiated with Estonian and Latvian authorities, the Baltic Germans packed up to leave. They understood the terrible consequences of remaining – a repetition of the horrors of 1919. Latvians and Estonians also grasped the implications of these activities. With Germans leaving and Soviets arriving, it could only mean one thing: the days of Estonian and Latvian independence were numbered. All in all 61,858 Baltic resettlers left Latvia and Estonia by early December 1939. In early 1941 after the annexation of the Baltic States by the Soviets, the Reich removed another 17,101 in the so-called *Nachumsiedlung*, or post-resettlement. The *Umsiedlung* did not affect the Germans of Lithuania, mostly farmers living on a strip of Lithuania contiguous to East Prussia. They would, however, be removed in March 1941 – a transfer of 50,904 Germans.¹⁹

The departure of the Baltic Germans had fateful ramifications for the Baltic region in the upcoming conflict. Various Reich security, intelligence and military agencies and authorities lined up to recruit Baltic Germans. The intelligence branch of the Wehrmacht, the *Abwehr*, enlisted thousands of these resettlers, many of them war veterans familiar with the region. Another major recruiter was *Reichsführer* SS Heinrich Himmler's organization the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), particularly its security and intelligence branches under Reinhardt Heydrich and its rapidly growing armed branch, the *Waffen-SS*.²⁰ Numerous civilian agencies and offices also competed for their services, above all Alfred Rosenberg's *Ostministerium*, which became the nominal Reich administrative authority in the Occupied East.

The resettlements profoundly affected the Baltic peoples. First, for many of them, getting rid of their historic nemesis fulfilled national

¹⁸ Dietrich A. Loeber, *Diktierter Option: Die Umsiedlung der Deutsch-Balten aus Estland und Lettland, 1939–1941* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholz Verlag, 1972); Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 158–60; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 34–7.

¹⁹ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, pp. 165–70.

²⁰ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 264–5; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 36–7; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, pp. 211–14.

aspirations, which seemed incomplete as long as Germans remained. But their presence also had provided something of an insurance policy, a trip-wire protecting the Baltic from total Soviet domination. With the Germans gone, nothing stood in the way of the Soviets. Furthermore, many Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians decided to seize this opportunity to get out by declaring and claiming whatever German connection they could. Especially during the *Nachumsiedlung*, having tasted Soviet rule and fearing for their lives, many Baltic officials and especially military officers identified themselves as ethnic Germans and tried to flee. Those that succeeded were also courted and recruited by various Reich entities. German authorities were especially eager to employ these most recent arrivals, since by early 1941 plans for Operation Barbarossa were in place and people familiar with the region – above all as interpreters since many Baltic Germans spoke little if any Estonian, Latvian or Lithuanian – were in high demand. These Baltic exiles were eager to return to their homelands, whether in the grey uniforms of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS, the black of the SS security forces, or even in the mustard-yellow attire of Rosenberg's administrators.²¹

Prior to Operation Barbarossa the Baltic States endured one more major trauma, their forced annexation into the Soviet Union. By the time several thousand of these Baltic émigré nationals arrived home, all three states had lost their independence to Soviet annexation, and their soldiers had been humiliated, first by being denied the chance to resist the Soviets and second by the dissolution of their national armies. They also re-entered with revenge on their minds for the arrests, murders and deportations of their fellow Baltic peoples, often their dearest loved ones among the victims. At this early stage of the conflict hopes for restoring national independence, revenge for Russian atrocities, and rebuilding the foundations for national armies provided sufficient justification and reasons to join Hitler's crusade.

It was just a matter of time before Stalin finalized his preliminary claims to the Baltic States. Stalin struck in step with Hitler's attack in the West in May 1940, while Hitler as well as the French and the British were too preoccupied to interfere. Without elaborating details, in mid-June on the pretext of Lithuanians kidnapping two Russian soldiers, the Soviets demanded a total military occupation of Lithuania and marched in on 15 June.²² After Molotov similarly intimidated and brow-beat Latvia and Estonia, the Red Army likewise occupied them.²³ Then, after

²¹ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 264–5, 288; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 27, 59, 108.

²² Lane, pp. 39–40; Buttar, pp. 39–40; Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 91–2.

²³ Smith, pp. 27–8; Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 97–109.

choreographing fraudulent pro-Soviet elections in July, in August Stalin incorporated all three as Soviet Socialist Republics. Besides losing their independence, the two most important consequences of the annexation in determining Baltic choices in 1941 were the destruction of the Baltic militaries and the terror of 13–14 June 1941. It should be noted that all three regimes considered resistance to the occupation, but deemed it foolhardy. The Estonian military, encouraged by Finnish success against the Russians, more adamantly professed the idea that armed action should at least be attempted.²⁴ The decision not to resist lingered in the collective memories of the Baltic peoples as they weighed the prospects of joining Hitler.

After the Soviets occupied Lithuania they proceeded to create a People's Army, one more in tune with the Red Army. The NKVD, the Soviet secret police, rounded up senior army commanders, arresting some, executing others, deporting the rest. By the time of the elections in July the army had been purged and revamped.²⁵ Political considerations, above all attitudes toward Communism, determined one's fate. Many anticipating this eventuality fled across the border to Germany where they founded the Lithuanian Action Front, LAF (*Lietuvių Aktyvistų Frontas*), a player in Lithuania's future military relationship with Germany. Those avoiding capture but remaining in Lithuania hid and waited for the chance to wreak vengeance on the Russians.²⁶

As for the rank and file, they participated in 'spontaneous' demonstrations and underwent re-education under political officers, the *politrucks*. In late August the Red Army absorbed Lithuania's People's Army as the 29th Rifle Corps. Once incorporated, officers and soldiers were required to pledge loyalty to the Soviet Union, which many, at the risk of their lives, refused to do. Most were punished, even shot, while others fled to the forests to join the growing numbers waiting to resurface. Paramilitary forces were disarmed; their leaderships were decimated by arrests, executions and deportations. They too, fearing for their lives, went into hiding.²⁷

In Estonia on 17 June the Red Army occupied military bases, camps, barracks, airfields and other facilities. Estonian soldiers relocated to schools and whatever accommodations they could find. Their army also was brought in line with the Red Army with the imposition of the

²⁴ Taagepera, pp. 59–60; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 37–40; Smith, pp. 24–5.

²⁵ Lane, p. 40; V. Stanley Vardys (ed.), *Lithuania under the Soviets: Portrait of a Nation 1940–65* (New York: Praeger, 1965) pp. 55, 63.

²⁶ Vardys, *Lithuania under the Soviets*, pp. 55, 63.

²⁷ Vardys, *Lithuania under the Soviets*, pp. 55, 63; Vardys and Sedaitis, p. 53.

omnipresent *politruks*. On the night of 21 June armed mobs descended on some of the haphazard army shelters demanding the soldiers surrender their weapons. Many of the vigilante groups were accompanied by Red Army or NKVD personnel. In one instance Estonian soldiers refused to surrender their arms and a fire-fight ensued. Orders to cease from the newly reformed government and the arrival of Soviet tanks ended the skirmish.²⁸

The Soviet authorities ordered all Estonian civilians to give up their weapons, a decree punishable by death if disobeyed. This included the *Kaitseliit*, which was disarmed and then disbanded on 27 June, with many of its leaders among the earliest victims to Soviet terror. Soviet-organized Red militias appropriated *Kaitseliit* weapons and facilities. Thousands of Estonian military personnel as well as *Kaitseliit* men went into hiding. Shortly the Red Army absorbed the reduced and shattered remnants of the Estonian Army as the 22nd Rifle Corps. As repressive Soviet rule continued into 1941, life in the military became unbearable and hundreds more deserted, adding to a steady stream joining their Forest Brothers.²⁹

The fate of the Latvian Army followed suit. It too morphed into a People's Army. The transition began at the top with dismissals and replacements by more malleable, cooperative types. Purges throughout the ranks followed the changes in leadership as political leanings and past records determined one's future. The purging reduced the army by about a half. In late August the Latvian People's Army was integrated into the Red Army as the 24th Rifle Corps, a force of around 8,000 men. The 24th Corps, along with the former Lithuanian and Estonian armies, came under the authority of the Baltic Military Region (*Pribaltijski Vojennij Okrug*) or PRIBOVO, headquartered in Riga. All Baltic officers serving abroad, especially military attachés, were ordered to return home. Those refusing would be designated deserters.³⁰

Although Latvian officers began disappearing at the time of the Soviet invasion the previous June, the Red Army attempted to annihilate the entire Latvian officer cadre in one swoop. In spring 1941 the 24th Corps bivouacked at Litene in eastern Latvia. Many enlisted men were sent home, further reducing the Corps' numbers, and in early June the officers were placed under guard. Some officers smelled a rat and escaped.

²⁸ Igor I. Kavass and Adolph Sprudz (eds.), *Baltic States: A Study of their Origin and National Development, Their Seizure and Incorporation into the U.S.S.R.*, International Military Law and History Reprint Series, Vol. IV (Buffalo, NY: William S. Hines, 1972), pp. 251–6; Misiunas and Taagepera, p. 67.

²⁹ Kavass and Sprudz, pp. 251–6.

³⁰ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 129–33.

Others were rounded up and sent off, allegedly to Moscow for instruction, but their destination was the Norilsk labour camp in Siberia. On the morning of 14 June over a hundred were put on trucks to go for training, but upon arrival they were surrounded by armed NKVD and shot. The remainder at Litene were arrested, some to be shot, others deported to Norilsk. Only 3,000 Latvians remained with the 24th Corps when the Germans invaded the following week.³¹

Unknown to the Latvian soldiers and officers at Litene, simultaneously with their ordeal, on the night of 13–14 June the rest of the nation endured a nightmare of terror, arrests, deportations and murder. Latvians were not the sole victims. In a coordinated campaign Estonians and Lithuanians suffered through exactly the same scenario on the same night. With lists of victims in hand, local Red militias accompanied by the NKVD, scoured cities, towns, and the countryside for their prey, which included entire families, men, women and children. Most were designated ‘enemies of the people’ of one category or another, but leading the way were members of paramilitary groups, above all *Aizsargi* in Latvia and the *Kaitseliit* of Estonia, as well as still-at-large military men, policemen, clergy, educators and others with proven nationalist inclinations or outspoken anti-Soviet attitudes. In Latvia 14,693 people were arrested or deported that night and for the entire year 34,250 deported, murdered or missing. For Lithuania the numbers stood at around 17,000, with 39,000 for the year; and for Estonia, some 10,200 during the single night and for the year, 61,000 in all – the greater number attributed to a much longer Soviet presence.³² Jews constituted a significant portion of the victims, thus discrediting the myth that the Soviet regimes favoured Jews and that as a group they played a prominent role in the roundups.³³ These massive deportations go a long way in explaining the bitterness and hatred of the Baltic peoples for the Soviets and the willingness, even eagerness with which many took up arms against them and fought alongside the Germans.

Early on the morning of 22 June 1941 Hitler unleashed Operation Barbarossa, a three-pronged assault aimed at Leningrad, Moscow and through the Ukraine on the way to the Caucasus. Attacking through the Baltic States was Army Group North, commanded by Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb. The invading force consisted of two armies, with the 16th on the right flank under Ernst Busch and the 18th on the left under Georg

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–33.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 133–9; Vardys and Sedaitis, p. 54; Voren, p. 57; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 40–1; Smith, pp. 34–5; Lane, pp. 51–2; Buttar, pp. 47–8.

³³ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, p. 137; Voren, p. 27.

von Küchler, and Erich Hoepner's 4th Panzer Group. The assault originated in East Prussia, crossing the border into Lithuania, then driving into Latvia before splitting, with the 18th heading north into Estonia and the 16th veering east into Russia. Both would converge on Leningrad. Of the three army groups, North would be the weakest, though it included 650,000 men and nearly 1,400 tanks. Facing Army Group North along the border and in the Baltic States awaited the Red Army's Baltic Region forces of nearly equal strength under the command of Fyodor Kuznetsov. Lost in Kuznetsov's ranks were the puny remnants of the three Baltic armies, the 22nd, 24th, and 29th Rifle Corps.³⁴

Within the ranks of Army Group North marched thousands of men returning home to the Baltic. Many were Baltic Germans, some of whom had emigrated to the Reich during and after the First World War, while others were of more recent Baltic vintage, arriving in Germany during the course of the recent resettlements. A younger von Küchler himself had fought in the Baltic in the *Freikorps* of Rüdiger von der Göltz.³⁵ Every major German formation within Army Group North, both in the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS, contained within its ranks Baltic Germans familiar with the land and its peoples. Non-combat groups trailed closely behind, including the 'carpetbaggers' of the *Ostministerium*, the civil administration office under Alfred Rosenberg, himself a Baltic German native of Tallinn.³⁶

The most sinister outfit of all was a relatively new creation of Himmler's SS, *Einsatzgruppe A*, an armed, mobile special security unit under the auspices of Heydrich's *Sicherheitsdienst*, SD, assigned to follow in the rear of Army Group North rounding up and eliminating political and racial enemies of the Reich – meaning Soviet officials, Red Army political commissars and Jews. In command was SD officer Franz Walter Stahlecker. An additional SS authority was the HSSPF, the Highest SS Police Leader, one assigned to each of Rosenberg's administrative regions. The SS authorities also employed as many Baltic Germans as they could gather.³⁷

Throughout the invading force Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians had placed themselves at the Reich's disposal. These were the first native Baltic fighters to join Hitler's crusade. Their principal motivation for collaboration at this juncture was to return and join the liberation of their

³⁴ Buttar, pp. 59–60; Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 140–1, 151–8.

³⁵ Buttar, pp. 59–60.

³⁶ Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981), pp. 24–6; Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 144–51, 171–180.

³⁷ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 166–72; Buttar, pp. 64–5.

respective countries from Soviet oppression, to be followed by resurrecting national independence. It was self-evident to them that revived independence also meant restoration of national armed forces.³⁸ Alongside these political and military purposes stood the simple factor of revenge, as well as the satisfaction of fighting the Bolsheviks, an opportunity denied them earlier at the time of the Soviet occupation.

The Lithuanians were probably the boldest in proposing collaboration. Colonel Oskaras Urbonas offered to organize an entire brigade to march in with the Wehrmacht, but the Germans wanted no such thing, preferring instead individual Lithuanians dispersed across Army Group North. Hitler scorned the notion of non-Germans, particularly Easterners fighting alongside racially pure Germans. The Lithuanian military attaché in Berlin, Kazys Škirpa, was more successful promoting Lithuanian interests. He assumed the lead in organizing a resistance movement of Lithuanian émigrés and refugees in Germany, which on 17 November 1940 emerged as the aforementioned LAF.³⁹

Škirpa recruited from among a thousand or so Lithuanian army officers, security police officials, and civil officials and servants. Although all Lithuanians were welcome in the LAF – except for Poles and Jews – the majority were followers of Augustinas Voldemaras, an ultra-nationalist, anti-communist, anti-Semite, who had disappeared in the tumult of the Soviet takeover of June 1940. The LAF maintained contacts with the armed groups biding time in the forests, an estimated force of 36,000. To this purpose in March 1941 Škirpa had issued a confidential ‘Directive for the Liberation of Lithuania’, which assumed a German-Soviet conflict would erupt soon, at which time the organized cells and units inside Lithuania would stage an insurrection, declare independence, and establish a provisional government for a free Lithuania. Almost all went according to plan, and when on 22 June the Germans crossed into Lithuania, the LAF rose up. The Germans deemed Škirpa, whose plans did not correspond to theirs, too successful and placed him under house arrest, thereby preventing his return to Lithuania. He eventually wound up in a German concentration camp, but survived.⁴⁰

Since émigré Latvians and Estonians inside Germany were farther removed from their homelands, they were in no position to organize

³⁸ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 264–6; Purs, p. 30; V. Stanley Vardys (ed.), *Lithuania under the Soviets*, p. 68; Misiunas and Taagepera, p. 61.

³⁹ Vardys, *Lithuania under the Soviets*, pp. 64–9.

⁴⁰ Van Voren, pp. 60–5; Vardys, *Lithuania under the Soviets*, pp. 68–9; Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 45–6.



Figure 13.1 Public murder of Jews by Lithuanian nationalists after the occupation of the city by German forces (Kaunas, 28 June 1941).

resistance back home at the level of the LAF. Nonetheless Latvian and Estonian officers and former government officials sought out various German authorities to plead for their national interests, including national sovereignty, which presumed native self-rule and a restoration of military forces. They intended to exploit their willingness to collaborate to their political advantage. For the time being individuals, not units, would return home with the Wehrmacht, the Waffen-SS, or security forces such as the *Einsatzgruppen*, or even with Rosenberg's civil administration.

The three Baltic nations shared in common the prospect of regaining national sovereignty and recreating their military forces, but they had grossly misread and misunderstood the Germans. Hitler had no intention to restore anything smacking of national sovereignty to the Baltic peoples. Without belabouring specifics, for Hitler the East, including the Baltic region, was to be conquered for future colonization and for the Germanization of the land and peoples. He displayed his vision in *Mein Kampf*, which was reflected in countless plans, above all *Generalplan Ost*,

to which Rosenberg's office as well as the SS contributed and drew upon it for policies.⁴¹

Racial presumptions of ideologically steeped men like Rosenberg and Himmler determined the futures of the Baltic peoples. In their minds the three Baltic peoples ranked somewhere between the superior Nordic peoples and inferior Slavs. Among the Baltic peoples the Nazi racial 'experts' placed the Estonians at the top, due to their affinity and association with the Finns as well as other Scandinavians. For colonizing the *Lebensraum* Rosenberg deemed at least 80 per cent of Estonians of valuable Nordic racial stock and capable of being Germanized. As for Latvians, their suitability dropped to around 50 per cent, as a result of more mixing with Slavs, and their 'natural' proclivity toward communism. The Lithuanians, due to their historic ties with Poles, their proximity to Jews, and their Catholicism, only some 15 per cent would be privileged to become Germans. Of those not making the racially superior category, most would be shipped off to the more distant East to live among the even lower-rated Slavs. This Nazi ideal clearly did not coincide with Baltic national goals.⁴²

True to expectations, on 22 June as Army Group North crossed the Lithuanian border, the LAF insurgency erupted. They attacked Soviet garrisons and harassed Red troops across Lithuania, and on the next day captured the radio station in Kaunas, proclaiming independence and the creation of a provisional government. Although the LAF provided most of the guerrillas, Lithuanians of the 29th Corps deserted in mass and also turned on the Soviets. In the fighting, an estimated 2,000 Lithuanians fell, more than the total in the war for independence. When von Küchler's forces arrived in Kaunas on June 24, they could virtually parade into the city, to be greeted by a jubilant population, cheering, strewing flowers, flying Lithuanian flags. At least initially the Lithuanians welcomed the Germans as liberators.⁴³

Unrestrained joy soon soured into disappointment. Though pleased with the Lithuanian military effort, the Germans were not at all happy with the setting up of a provisional government. Nor did they approve the presence of armed Lithuanian forces intending to become a national army. Wehrmacht commanders knew that a German occupation could not tolerate native armed formations or any semblance of self-rule. Immediately the Germans began disarming and disbanding the LAF,

⁴¹ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 144–51; Dallin, pp. 101–6, 168, 182–98.

⁴² Dallin, pp. 276–92; Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 149–51; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 71–3; Buttar, pp. 55–7.

⁴³ Vardys, *Lithuania under Soviet Rule*, pp. 65–6, 68–9; Voren, p. 61.

which for the moment dashed hopes for a national army. The Germans also encountered the Provisional Government, but preferring to avoid using force, they decided to simply ignore it.⁴⁴

The Germans arrived in Daugavpils in southeast Latvia on 26 June and entered Riga on 1 July. In Latvia partisan bands also lay low and waited for an opportunity to rise, and as soon as word of the German invasion reached them thousands of armed Latvians began attacking Soviets as well as local Red militias. As did the Lithuanians in Kaunas, Latvians occupied the Riga radio station on 28 June, declaring liberation and the restoration of independence. But this occupation was short-lived, as Red soldiers retook the station. Some historical controversy surrounds the liberation of Riga; Latvian nationalists claim that Latvians had driven out the Russians prior to the German arrival – as in Kaunas and Vilnius – though a more likely scenario was a Red Army withdrawal, leaving a vacuum filled by Latvians. In Riga and across Latvia the elated and relieved population greeted the Germans as liberators, festooning tanks with flowers, waving flags, and singing the Latvian national anthem. The celebrants tossed one startled German motorcycle soldier repeatedly into the air with cheers of ‘Hurrah!’⁴⁵

The first Reich authorities in the Baltic were Wehrmacht commanders. As long as the territory officially remained part of the front they were in control, but once the army moved forward and it was formally designated a rear area, Rosenberg’s civil administration would begin functioning. In Riga two competing Latvian provisional governments offered their services. One was the Latvian Organization Center (LOC), composed of former army officers and government officials. The other, led by Gustavs Celmiņš, a *Pērkonkrusts* (Fire Cross) leader, aligned with the Nazis because of its racist, anti-Semitic ideological affinities. He even offered to organize two divisions of Latvians to fight alongside the Germans, which the Germans rejected.⁴⁶

In addition to military authorities another Reich official showed up who figured prominently in events, SD officer Walther Stahlecker, head of *Einsatzgruppe A*. As was the case in Kaunas, in Riga the SS and the military together sorted out matters and decided that the over-eager Celmiņš and his *Pērkonkrusts* would be too troublesome to deal with and settled for a moderate coalition of Latvian army officers and former civil

⁴⁴ Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 45–6; Vardys, *Lithuania under Soviet Rule* pp. 55–6.

⁴⁵ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 158–63; Misiunas-Taagepera, pp. 46–7; Purs, pp. 28–9.

⁴⁶ Buttar, pp. 135–6; Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 161–3; Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 45–6.



Figure 13.2 Lieutenant-General Kurt Daluege in discussion with the Latvian officer Voldemārs Veiss.

officials. This group nevertheless expected to become a provisional government, a first step toward independence, but learned quickly that even talk of autonomy, or even some sort of national identity would be in vain. In Latvia, as in Lithuania, the military and SS security forces ordered the improvised units to surrender their weapons and disband. So much for a reconstituted military force – at least for the time being.⁴⁷

From Latvia the Germans advanced into Estonia on 7 July. They expected no more resistance from the Red Army there than they encountered farther south, but the Soviets rallied, brought up reinforcements, and as Army Group North neared Leningrad, resistance intensified, combat became fiercer. The Estonians directly contributed to the fighting. As early as 1940 Estonians by the thousands, mainly soldiers and members of the *Kaitseliit* (KL) had taken to the woods to join their Forest Brothers. At the start of Barbarossa they emerged reorganized as

⁴⁷ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 160–72, 180–7.

the *Omakaitse*, the Home Guard (OK), old wine in new bottles. Since the Germans only appeared in Estonia on 7 July, for two weeks the OK had waged a guerilla war on their own. Indeed, Estonians have referred to their insurgency against the Soviets as a distinct 'Summer War'.⁴⁸ Once inside Estonia the Germans regrouped and on 22 July launched a concerted assault that took them through Tartu, reaching the Gulf of Finland on 7 August. Narva fell to the Germans on 16 August, and on 19 August the battle for Tallinn commenced and continued until 28 August, when the Soviets evacuated by sea some 28,000 combatants as well as civilians. The Baltic campaign ended on 21 October, with the occupation of the last of the Estonian islands.⁴⁹

The same day as the Soviets vacated Tallinn the Germans entered to the enthusiastic welcome of the remaining population, one comparable to receptions in Kaunas and Riga. The Estonians, however, had proportionately suffered even more than their neighbours to the south. Since the German conquest – or 'liberation' – of Estonia took much longer, the Soviets had more time to depopulate Estonia, by some 61,000. After this ordeal the Estonians also envisioned a restoration of independence and a rehabilitation of national armed forces, but they too hoped in vain. As matters turned out, however, German occupation here would be among the more lenient in Nazi Europe, in part due to the privileged racial status of its people as well as their eagerness to collaborate.⁵⁰

The Estonians offered a ready-made provisional government under Jüri Uluots, the last prime minister of free Estonia. But the Germans, having learned a lesson in Lithuania and Latvia where they encountered native-proposed provisional governments, brought a ready-made puppet in tow, Hjalmar Mäe. In step with earlier measures in Lithuania and Latvia, military and SS authorities disarmed the *Omakaitse* fighters – but only temporarily. It was clear that the Germans would not re-establish a sovereign state or a national army, but at the outset it was also apparent that the Estonians pleased the new masters.⁵¹

No sooner had the Germans disarmed the improvised guerilla bands in all three states, they began rearming 'self-defence' forces under Reich authority, mostly that of the SS, embodied in Walther Stahlecker's *Einsatzgruppe A* units and their officers. The thousands of disarmed fighters were more than willing to continue the job they had started, rooting out native collaborators, hunting down Red Army stragglers and

⁴⁸ Weiss-Wendt, p. 104.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–8; Misiunas and Taagepera, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Weiss-Wendt, pp. 46–8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–8, 71–3; Misiunas-Taagepera, p. 50; Smith, p. 37.

eliminating Communist officials and others deemed ‘enemies’. Since the Baltic personnel accompanying German forces in the initial invasion were the first to choose to fight for the Reich, those recruited in their homelands as security troops became the second wave of Baltic fighters enlisted by the Germans.⁵²

Unfortunately – though Baltic national historians and publicists are reluctant to admit it – among the designated ‘enemies’ of these self-defence units were hundreds of thousands of Jews. This initial phase of arming Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians was integrally connected to the Baltic phase of the Holocaust. Many of the same men that battled the Red Army and its partisans in hopes of re-establishing their national independence also hunted down and killed Jews. This is the tragic irony of Baltic participation on Hitler’s side in this war.

As soon as the Germans crossed into Lithuania, insurgents, mostly organized by the LAF, began rooting out not only Red Army personnel and Communist officials and sympathizers, but as noted in *Einsatzgruppe A* reports, also Jews – a kind of ‘self-cleansing’. This should not come as a surprise, since as early as March 1941 the LAF issued leaflets warning Jews to get out of Lithuania before it was too late and declared that when Lithuania was liberated from the Soviets, they would get rid of Jews. Threats against Jews became regular features of LAF publications.⁵³ Personal anti-Semitism played a role for some perpetrators, but weighing even more heavily was the perceived Jewish role in the bloody repression of the Soviet occupation. Many of those involved in the killings participated as an act of revenge against those who allegedly had murdered or deported friends, relatives, family members and fellow countrymen. This vengeance, inspired by local anti-semitism, was also meant as a gesture to please the Germans, demonstrating Lithuanian loyalty to the Nazi cause in the hope of winning favour.⁵⁴

When *Einsatzgruppe A* arrived the following day Stahlecker sought out the LAF to instigate more anti-Jewish actions around Kaunas before the Wehrmacht disarmed all Lithuanians. Once these actions began, they spread to other locations across the country, some encouraged by Germans, others entirely spontaneous. Stahlecker decided to bring the process under his control and began organizing Lithuanian volunteers into units under SS auspices. He discovered many Lithuanians of the defunct 29th Corps in POW *stalags* more than willing to volunteer. Known first as Defence Battalions (*Tautines Darbo Apsaugos Batalionas*)

⁵² Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 158–63, 165–8; Buttar, pp. 97–101.

⁵³ Lane, pp. 53–6; Voren, pp. 65–6; Buttar, pp. 109–12.

⁵⁴ Buttar, pp. 103–5; Voren, pp. 67–9.

or TDA, these passed through several permutations until they emerged as the infamous Police Battalions, which became the principal form of Lithuanian military service for the Germans.⁵⁵

One of the earliest actions of the SS-commanded battalions occurred at the notorious installations known as the 'Forts' in and around Kaunas. In collaboration with units of *Einsatzgruppe A* several battalions slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews in the Forts. Another disreputable outfit was *Rollkommando Hamman*, a mobile killing unit consisting of German *Einsatzkommandos* and a Lithuanian battalion of some 450 men. Commanded by SS officer Joachim Hamman of Baltic German descent, it criss-crossed the country performing its bloody deeds.⁵⁶ Lithuanians presumed these battalions, which were supposed to operate solely in Lithuania, would serve as a nucleus for rebuilding a national army, fighting for independence – a hope soon to be dashed. Almost right away they were deployed outside the country, at times fighting regular Soviet troops, but mostly hunting Red partisans, which also meant murdering Jews. As Arthur Nebe, the commander of *Einsatzgruppe B*, remarked: 'Where there's a partisan there's a Jew, and where there's a Jew, there's a partisan.'⁵⁷ Not all Lithuanians served in the Police Battalions, however, since the SS allotted some to other Security Police offices and absorbed others directly into the *Einsatzgruppe*.

By August 1941 around twenty battalions were in existence – peaking at more than thirty – averaging some 400 men each, with a total of some 8,000, a number that remained about the same throughout the German occupation. As time went on, more battalions deployed abroad, some as far away as the Leningrad and even Stalingrad fronts, but most commonly in Byelorussia and the Ukraine. Though the Police Battalions were very effective in murdering tens of thousands of Jews, in the end Lithuania provided the smallest armed force to serve the German cause.⁵⁸

As prospects for German recognition of independence faded, and chances of resurrecting a national army withered, Lithuanians became increasingly disenchanted, and in mid-September the LAF protested in an angry letter to Hitler. The Germans, not sympathetic at all, cracked

⁵⁵ Chris Bishop, *Hitler's Foreign Divisions: Foreign Volunteers in the Waffen-SS, 1940–1945* (London: Amber Books, 2005), pp. 109–13; Buttar, pp. 109–12; Voren, pp. 65–6, 76–7; Lane, pp. 53–6.

⁵⁶ Weiss-Wendt, pp. 106–7, 121–2; Voren, pp. 76–8, 87.

⁵⁷ Timm C. Richter, 'Die Wehrmacht und der Partisanenkrieg in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion' in Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (eds.), *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1999), p. 845. See also Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, p. 169.

⁵⁸ Bishop, pp. 109–13

down on the LAF, descending on its headquarters in Berlin as well as in Lithuania, arresting many and dispatching them to concentration camps – a fate slated for many Baltic would-be collaborators who angered the Germans.⁵⁹ In Lithuania the LAF went back underground and German-Lithuanian relations, not very good to begin with, deteriorated further. The Lithuanian Police Battalions, nonetheless, continued to function.⁶⁰

When the Wehrmacht entered Riga on 1 July, armed Latvian bands were already rounding up and shooting communists and some Jews. In order to stoke anti-Jewish vitriol, a common practice was to have Jews disinter recently murdered victims of Soviet terror, thereby associating the mutilated corpses with the Jews. Arriving from Lithuania, Stahlecker and the SS sought to bring the executioners and fighting units under their control. They disarmed the Latvians, but then reorganized them and rearmed them as self-defence units intended for use in the campaign to exterminate Jews. One of the most eager collaborators with the SS security authorities was *Pērkonkrusts* operative Gustavs Celmiņš, who helped raise several battalions. Celmiņš, however, later ran afoul of the Gestapo and ended up with many other erstwhile collaborators in a concentration camp. The most infamous executioners were the *Arājs* Commando, or ‘*Arājs* Boys’, some 500 mostly *Pērkonkrust* members who started by murdering Jews in Riga and then travelled in blue buses around Latvia – as did the *Rollkommando Hamman* in Lithuania – killing Jews that local *Aizsargi* and others had rounded up.⁶¹ Eventually the ‘Boys’ disbanded and joined Police Battalions and later the Latvian Legion, claiming in the post-war era that as Legionnaires they had served solely as soldiers fighting the Red Army and not as executioners.

Other battalions formed under former military leadership, such as the 5,000 men Lieutenant-Colonels Voldemars Veiss and Roberts Osis mobilized. So many former soldiers, *Aizsargi* and policemen volunteered that many had to be turned away. At least in this early stage of restoring a Latvian military force – and this was also true for Lithuanians and Estonians – all were enthusiastic, genuine volunteers, motivated by hopes of national independence, recreating a Latvian army and revenge. Although the principal focus of officers such as Veiss and Osis was to rebuild a Latvian army, and they resigned themselves to accepting the battalions as the first step, among their early duties were police assignments hunting down Soviet partisans as well as shooting Jews.⁶²

⁵⁹ Voren, pp. 65–6.

⁶⁰ See Bishop for more details on Lithuanian Battalion service.

⁶¹ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 166–70; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 106–7, 121–2.

⁶² Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 160–3, 264–6.

For the time being Himmler and *Obergruppenführer* Gottlob Berger, head of the recruiting office of the SS Main Office, were satisfied with the battalions, which as security formations brought the locals under SS control in small, decentralized units. They could also mollify Hitler's aversion to utilizing non-Germans as soldiers by calling them security policemen. Familiarity with the language and the countryside made these units perfect security operatives in the occupied territories. Nonetheless, their fields of operation approached closer and closer to the front, and by the end of October 1941 the Latvian 16th Battalion was located near Staraya Russa, and in April 1942 the Latvian 21st Battalion was fully engaged at the Leningrad front. Other units ranged as far afield as Warsaw and as security for transporting Jews to Treblinka.⁶³

Units of *Einsatzgruppe A* reached Tallinn on 28 August to discover a new organization, the *Omakaitse*, or Home Guard. Having fought the Red Army for two months in coordination with the Wehrmacht, Estonians had already established a relationship of trust with the Germans. Whereas German relations with the Latvians were fraught with misunderstanding and distrust, and those with the Lithuanians bordered on hostility, the SS found the Estonians pliable and cooperative.⁶⁴ The *Omakaitse* rounded up enemies, including Jews, and did not balk at joining security forces and police battalions. Since Estonia had a tiny pre-war community of Jews and most of them, some 2,500, had escaped along with the Red Army, the killing units had only a thousand or so to dispatch. Therefore the majority of victims in Estonia, some 6,000, consisted of fellow countrymen that had worked for or sympathized with the Soviet occupiers.⁶⁵

By the end of 1941 an estimated 40,000 Estonians, almost all from the *Omakaitse*, had volunteered for service with the Germans. Most remained in the *Omakaitse* securing Estonia while others, some 2,500 or so, manned Police Battalions. Since Estonia was rapidly cleared of 'enemies', the police and security units were deployed to more hostile places such as the rear areas of the Leningrad front and Byelorussia, where they engaged 'partisan' forces, meaning primarily Jews. Another source of manpower consisted of Estonians who had fought for the Finns or had fled to Finland and Sweden during the Soviet occupation. They returned in July, and the Germans promptly assigned them to one unit or another.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 306–9.

⁶⁴ Weiss-Wendt, pp. 91, 94–7.

⁶⁵ Weiss-Wendt, pp. 57–8, 62–3, 71–2; Smith, p. 36.

⁶⁶ Weiss-Wendt, p. 74; Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 54–5; Buttar, pp. 139–41.

Another goal of the Baltic peoples, along with restoring their national armies, was reclaiming sovereignty. The Wehrmacht officers responsible for administering rear areas in Lithuania and Latvia quickly squelched efforts to form native governments. In late August as the army advanced toward Leningrad the generals handed over administrative responsibilities in Kaunas and Riga to the 'Golden Pheasants' of Alfred Rosenberg's *Ostministerium*. Rosenberg had named his Baltic realm the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, with four sub-regions known as *Generalbezirk*, one each for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Byelorussia (White Russia). The preeminent administrator ruling from Riga was *Reichkommissar* Hinrich Lohse, with subordinate *Generalkommissar* Theodor von Renteln stationed in Kaunas; Otto-Heinrich Drechsler in Riga; and Karl Litzmann in Tallinn. Civil administration did not arrive in Estonia until early December.⁶⁷

One of the first tasks of the *Ostministerium* officials was to resolve disputes among local factions vying for recognition. In each Baltic *Kommissariat* the authorities created so-called national 'directorates' or 'self-administrations' which wielded no sovereign authority and simply executed German orders and policies. In Lithuania German favour fell on General Petras Kubiliunas, and in Latvia on General Oskars Dankers, a dull, unassertive collaborator referred to derisively as '*Herr Dankerschön*'.⁶⁸ In Estonia the matter had been settled with Hjalmar Mäe arriving on German coattails. Their main responsibility was to facilitate German exploitation of Baltic resources, material as well as human, particularly labour and military. From this point on the self-administrations, under the nominal direction of the *Ostministerium* but the enforcement authority of the SS, would collaborate in the recruitment of Baltic manpower for the German cause.⁶⁹

Without question the first Baltic recruits joining German armed units volunteered. But after the most ardent enthusiasts had found their niche, as the Baltic peoples realized the Germans would not restore even autonomy, much less independence, and as returning soldiers discovered that rebuilding national armed forces stood little chance, the sources of voluntary manpower dried up. The Germans also found recruitment for the Reich labour force difficult. Consequently *Ostminister* Rosenberg decreed in December 1941 a compulsory labour obligation for everyone aged eighteen to forty-five. Starting in early 1942 those eligible were to report to local labour offices and 'volunteer' for duty, choosing from three

⁶⁷ Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 49–50; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 57–73.

⁶⁸ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, p. 183; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 57–63.

⁶⁹ Purs, p. 30; Weiss-Wendt, pp. 61–3, 71–2; Misiunas and Taagepera, pp. 50, 64.

options: employment in Germany; joining the Wehrmacht as *Hilfswillige* (voluntary workers) or the *Luftwaffe* as air defence auxiliaries; or enlisting with the SS security police battalions.⁷⁰

Rosenberg's decree reeled in some draftees, but not nearly enough, since many registrants found ways to evade service. Hitler himself impeded the process by forbidding Eastern non-Germans to serve alongside German soldiers. The army short-circuited this ban by enlisting non-Germans as *Hilfswillige* for tasks such as drivers, construction workers, and other support duties, thereby releasing Germans for combat. The *Luftwaffe* did the same by recruiting auxiliaries to man flak units. The SS was already circumventing this prohibition by enlisting non-Germans in police formations, nominally performing security, not military service. But the tide of battle on the Eastern Front was already shifting and manpower needs became more acute. Waffen-SS divisions were taking especially horrendous losses and required constant replenishment. Furthermore, Berger and Himmler envisioned expanding the Waffen-SS with entirely new divisions.

While contemplating his quandary Berger looked for ways to leap recruitment hurdles. For one, as the war continued he became less stringent about racial perfection and voluntarism, and was more inclined to compromise SS standards. After all, the Baltic peoples, though non-Germanic, ranked only a notch or two below the Nordics in racial compatibility. Consequently in late 1941 Berger concocted the idea of national 'Legions' fighting under the auspices of the SS. The SS was already employing Baltic peoples in the police battalions, some of whom were already at the front, so why not incorporate them into so-called Legions. Nationalities would have their nominal ethnic units – an attractive recruiting ruse – but by serving under SS authority there could be no thought of these becoming national armies. He first sold the Legion concept to Himmler, who in turn eventually won over Hitler.⁷¹

With the notion of Legions on the drawing-board, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians were about to ride the third wave of their engagement with the Reich, that of the Waffen-SS – but this surge would crest toward the end of the war. Under the Waffen-SS their designation as 'volunteers', although officially retained, in practice would no longer apply. By 1942 genuine volunteerism had run its course in the Baltic. The disappointment of having their initial purposes for fighting alongside the Reich come to naught stifled their enthusiasm for volunteering. Within

⁷⁰ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 196–9; Misiunas and Taagapera, pp. 54–5; Voren, p. 75.

⁷¹ Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, pp. 271–6.

the first weeks of the German 'liberation' Baltic leaders realized that the liberators were not going to restore their lost independence, not even autonomy. As for rebuilding national armed forces, the Germans forced the spontaneously formed armed units to surrender their weapons, and if they wanted them back, they could wield them only under Reich command. The only motive for joining Hitler's crusade was revenge – but revenge is not a sustainable purpose.

For the remainder of the war most Baltic fighters served under the auspices of the Waffen-SS and its Legions, one for the Estonians, another for the Latvians. The Lithuanians, however, spurned the creation of a Legion and Waffen-SS service – though they continued supplying Police Battalions.⁷² One promising twist to come out of this predicament was the realization on the part of the 'puppet' administrators that Reich decrees alone would not obtain the desired manpower. Since the Germans preferred that the native regimes and not they implemented conscription, indigenous consent, rewarded with Reich reciprocity, became the *modus operandi*.⁷³

Subsequently the mobilization of Baltic manpower for the Reich's armed forces would entail haggling over conscripting Baltic youth in return for piecemeal political concessions, with vague intimations of more substantial Reich largess in the future. In this manner all three nationalities continued to furnish manpower as they had before for the Police Battalions, the *Hilfswillige*, and *Luftwaffe* flak units. But in due course these blood-transactions led to the creation of the far more substantial and effective Estonian 20. *SS Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS*, and two Latvian divisions, 15. *Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS* and 19. *Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS* – respectively known as the Estonian and Latvian Legions.⁷⁴ As for the Lithuanians, their leaders refused to condone similar deals with the occupiers. The majority of their young men evaded German military service and escaped to the woods as Forest Brothers, saving themselves for a final showdown with the returning Red Army.⁷⁵ In one manner or another all three Baltic peoples had joined Hitler's crusade in 1941 and continued to serve its cause for better or worse until May 1945, but their service and sacrifices never reaped the expected dividends.

⁷² Lane, p. 57.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Bishop, pp. 85–9, 92–5, 109–13. For more on the three Baltic Divisions see Hugh Page Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization and History of the Waffen-SS*, Vol. 5 (San Jose, CA: Bender, 1982).

⁷⁵ Van Voren, pp. 31, 197, 111–12.

14 The Soviet Union

Oleg Beyda and Igor Petrov

Introduction

In post-war Soviet historiography the question of collaboration with the German occupation forces was not posed as such.¹ In the official memoirs of Soviet partisans and commanders, and in some works published in the West, there were oblique mentions of ‘turncoats’, of ‘these renegades and scum’, of ‘people with their roots in the former exploiting classes’, and of the creation of anti-Soviet formations from among local populations.² The participants in these formations were almost always presented as former criminals and nationalists.³ As an issue in itself, collaborationism was never distinguished on the basis of ideological causes; the very posing of the question would have testified to the existence of conflicting moods in society during the initial period of the war, and this would have contradicted the myth of the ‘unity of the party and the people’. There could be no question either of examining the motivations of these people, or of creating a more profound picture.

Following the collapse of the USSR a genuine breakthrough took place in the way the theme was addressed. Official publications sought to take issue with foreign works devoted specifically to the issue of collaboration with the enemy, while also defending ‘traditional’ views on the question.⁴ Against this background, historians of a new generation in the 1990s and early 2000s tried to establish an objective scholarly basis for examining the topic.⁵ Despite a wealth of previously inaccessible historical

¹ This chapter was translated from Russian by Renfrey Clarke.

² Vasilii Andreev, *Narodnaia voïna* (Moscow, 1952), p. 139; Sergei Shtemenko, *General’nyi shtab v gody voïny. Kn. 2* (Moscow, 1985), p. 413; Norbert Müller, *Vermakht i okkupatsiia* (Moscow, 1974), p. 108.

³ Sergei Ostryakov, *Voennye chekisty* (Moscow, 1979), p. 222.

⁴ See for example: Makhmut Gareev, ‘O mifakh, starykh i novykh’, in *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal* (1991, No.4), pp. 42–52; Aleksandr Kolesnik, *General Vlasov – predatel’ ili geroi?* (Moscow, 1991); Anatolii Bakhvalov, *General Vlasov: predatel’ ili geroi?* (Saint Petersburg, 1994); Evgenii Ziuzin, *Maloizvestnye stranitsy voïny* (Moscow, 1990).

⁵ Igor’ Ermolov, *Brigada Kaminskogo ili “shumel ne prosto Brianskii les”* (Orel, 1999); Kirill Aleksandrov, *Ofitserskii korpus armii general-leitënanta A.A. Vlasova 1944–1945 gg.* (Saint

material, some publications showed a marked inclination to idealize the people they depicted; this was particularly characteristic of publications by people who had taken part personally in the events.⁶ The phenomenon of collaboration by Soviet citizens was depicted as motivated by ideological factors rather than by prosaic needs; meanwhile, the question of war crimes committed by the collaborators was dealt with only parenthetically.

In the second half of the 2000s, study of the question of collaboration developed at an extremely rapid pace. Alongside the specialists who had begun their work in the 1990s new names appeared, and works began to be devoted both to examining the social processes in the occupied territories, and also to studying particular formations.⁷ The topic was then subdivided into studies of collaboration by non-Russian peoples: the Baltic nations,⁸ Belarusians,⁹ the peoples of the Caucasus¹⁰ and Ukrainians.¹¹ Moreover, the question of complicity in war crimes, and even participation in them, came under scrutiny.¹² On a limited scale, classic Western studies, memoirs and personal accounts relating to the topic began to be published in Russia.¹³ These include first of all the

Petersburg, 2001); Sergei Drobyazko, *Russkaia osvoboditel'naia armia* (Moscow, 1998); Mikhail Semiryaga, *Kollaboratsionizm* (Moscow, 2000).

⁶ *Materialy po istorii Russkogo osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia. Vyp. 1–4*, ed. Aleksandr Okorokov (Moscow, 1997–9).

⁷ Kirill Aleksandrov, *Protiv Stalina* (Sankt-Peterburg, 2003); *ibid.*, *Ofitserskii korpus armii general-leitenanta A. A. Vlasova 1944–1945* (Moscow, 2009); Sergei Drobyazko, *Pod znamenami vraga* (Moscow, 2005); Boris Kovalev, *Natsistskaia okkupatsiia i kollaboratsionizm v Rossii* (Moscow, 2004); Petr Krikunov, *Kazaki: mezhdru Gitlerom i Stalinym* (Moscow, 2005); Dmitrii Zhukov and Ivan Kovtun, *1-ia russkaia brigada SS 'Druzhina'* (Moscow, 2010); *ibid.*, *Russkaia politssiia* (Moscow, 2010); Ivan Gribkov, *Khoziaini Brianskikh lesov* (Moscow, 2008); Oleg Roman'ko, *Sovetskii legion Gitlera* (Moscow, 2006); Igor' Ermolov, *Russkoe gosudarstvo v nemetskom tyly* (Moscow, 2009); *ibid.*, *Tri goda bez Stalina* (Moscow, 2010); Boris Kovalev, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' naseleniia Rossii v period natsistskoi okkupatsii* (Moscow, 2011).

⁸ Petras Stankas, *Litovskie politseiskie batal'ony* (Moscow, 2009); Mikhail Krysin, *Latyshskii legion SS* (Moscow, 2006).

⁹ Aleksey Solov'ev, *Belorusskaia Tsentral'naia Rada: sozdanie, deiatel'nost', krakh* (Minsk, 1995); Oleg Roman'ko, *Legion pod znakom Pogoni* (Simferopol', 2008).

¹⁰ Eduard Abramyan, *Zabytyi legion* (Erevan, 2005); Georgii Mamulia, *Gruzinskii legion v bor'be za svobodu i nezavisimost' Gruzii v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voyny* (Tbilisi, 2003); Sergei Linets, *Severnyi Kavkaz nakanune i v period nemetsko-fashistskoi okkupatsii* (Pyatigorsk, 2009).

¹¹ Andrii Bolyanovs'kiĭ, *Ukrains'ki viys'kovi formuvanna v zbroynikh silakh Nimechchini (1939–1945)* (L'viv, 2003); Begliar Navruzov, *14-ia grenaderskaia diviziia SS 'Galichina'* (Moscow, 2010); Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist* (Stuttgart, 2014).

¹² *'Unichtozhit' kak možno bol'she...*, ed. Aleksandr Diukov, Vladimir Simindey (Moscow, 2009); *Pribaltika pod znakom svastiki*, ed. V. Bylinin et al. (Moscow, 2009).

¹³ Aleksandr Dallin, *Brigada Kaminskogo* (Moscow, 2011); Boris Khol'mston-Smyslovskii, *Pervaa Russkaia natsional'naia armia protiv SSSR* (Moscow, 2011); *ibid.*, *Na*

publications by George Fischer and Alexander Dallin,¹⁴ as well as those of Jürgen Thorwald and Joachim Hoffmann.¹⁵ Scholars who have concentrated on Nazi occupation policy and on the related topic of resistance to the partisan movement have also made a substantial contribution.¹⁶

The aim of the present chapter is to provide a survey of the extremely diverse phenomenon of Soviet collaborationism – why Soviet citizens joined Hitler's crusade as this emerged in the context of 1941. In our view, it was during that year that the principal features of the nascent phenomenon appeared, along with the major schisms – political, military and others – that were subsequently to widen and alter their forms. By the end of 1941 the formation of the Lokot' autonomous region had begun, the first police and anti-partisan units had been set up throughout the territory occupied by the Germans, and volunteer auxiliary forces (*Hilfswillige*, abbreviated to HiWi) had become firmly established in the army. Playing a role in shaping the phenomenon was collaboration by the inmates of camps (*Stalag*) for Soviet prisoners of war. This is a topic that has remained virtually unexamined, and on which we shall dwell in some detail.

It should be noted as an aside that collaborationism in the USSR still requires detailed study, and that on the whole, the topic is unfamiliar to Western readers. The phenomenon was also often more complex than analogous examples of collaboration with the occupiers in the countries of Western Europe. The ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union meant that

zakoldovannykh putiakh (Moscow, 2014); Konstantin Kromiadi, "Za zemliu, za voliu!" (Moscow, 2011); "Svershilos'. Prishli nemtsy!", ed. Oleg Budnitskii (Moscow, 2012); Odessa: *zhizn' v okkupatsii*, ed. Idem (Moscow, 2013); *Kollaboratsionizm v Sovetskom Soiúze*, ed. A. Zabelin, V. Korotaev (Moscow, 2014).

¹⁴ George Fischer, *Soviet Opposition to Stalin: A Case Study in World War II* (Cambridge, 1952); Alexander Dallin, *The German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945* (London, 1957); *ibid.*, Odessa, 1941–1944: *A Case Study of Soviet Territory Under Foreign Rule* (Santa Monica, CA, 1957).

¹⁵ Jürgen Thorwald, *Die Illusion. Rotarmisten in Hitlers Heeren* (Zürich, 1974); Joachim Hoffmann, *Deutsche und Kalmyken 1942 bis 1945* (Freiburg, 1974); *ibid.*, *Die Ostlegionen: Turkotataren, Kaukasier, und Wolgafinnen im deutschen Heer* (Freiburg, 1976); *ibid.*, *Die Geschichte der Wlassow-Armee* (Freiburg, 1986); *ibid.*, *Kaukasien 1942/43: Das deutsche Heere und die Orientvölker der Sowjetunion* (Freiburg, 1991).

¹⁶ *The Soviet Partisans in World War II*, ed. John A. Armstrong (Madison, NY, 1964); Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford, New York, Munich, 1989); Antonio J. Munoz, *The Druzhina SS Brigade: A History, 1941–1943* (New York, 2000); Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, 2004); Philip W. Blood, *Hitler's Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* (Washington, 2008); Stephan Lehnstaedt, 'The Minsk Experience: German Occupiers and Everyday Life in the Capital of Belarus', in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide and Radicalization*, ed. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahl (Rochester, NY, 2012), 240–66; Laurie R. Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis: Everyday Life in Occupied Russia* (Rochester, NY, 2013).

dissatisfied elements among various peoples, perceiving the Nazi invasion as a chance to alter the existing situation in society and the state, would advance diametrically opposite demands. In itself the phenomenon of Soviet collaboration took on many forms, while the motivation of the participants themselves was not always clearly defined. Broadly speaking there were civilian, military, ideological, religious and economic forms of collaboration, but the greatest multiplicity of forms can be identified in the civilian sphere, which fed all of the others. In our chapter we will concentrate largely on civilians in the region of Smolensk.

This multinational basis of collaborationism came into conflict with the Nazis' eastern policy of plundering resources and with their racist view of the world, in which the peoples of the USSR were assigned the exclusive – and moreover, dangerous – role of feeding the future prosperity of the German nation. Here, we see our task as revealing both the political aims of various groups of Soviet collaborators, and also the attempts that were made to realize these goals through establishing military formations and through collaboration with the German authorities.

The Political Plans of the Nazi Leadership

On 2 April 1941 Alfred Rosenberg wrote in his diary: “Rosenberg, your hour has come!” Those were the words with which the Führer concluded a two-hour talk with me today.¹⁷ It was on that date that Rosenberg was appointed as ‘head of administration for dealing in centralized fashion with questions of the eastern European expanse’; later, this obscure appointment would be replaced by the more definite ‘*Reichsminister* for the occupied eastern territories’. In the first memorandum that Rosenberg presented to Hitler,¹⁸ the future of the Soviet territories that after the attack on the USSR would come under German control was set out in considerable detail. They were to be divided into separate pseudo-state territorial formations (the Baltic region, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the rest of Russia). Some (Ukraine, the Caucasus) were to be supported with a view to weakening others (Russia), while there was to be broad economic exploitation.¹⁹

¹⁷ Alfred Rosenberg. *Die Tagebücher von 1934 bis 1944*, ed. Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr, (Frankfurt/M, 2015), p. 372.

¹⁸ Denkschrift vom 2.4.41, Betrifft: UdSSR (Document 1017-PS, IMT, Vol. XXVI).

¹⁹ The term *Ausbeutung* was used to designate this process. ‘Many tens of millions of the inhabitants of these territories will become redundant – they will die off or will have to be resettled in Siberia. Attempts to save this population from starving to death through use of the surpluses of the Black Sea region can only be made at the cost of [reducing] supplies to Europe.’ See: Wirtschaftspolitische Richtlinien für Wirtschaftsorganisation Ost, Gruppe Landwirtschaft vom 23.5.1941 (Document 126-EC, IMT, Vol. XXXVI).

In the case of Russia, the goal that was posed was 'complete annihilation of the Bolshevik-Jewish state apparatus with no encouragement for the founding of a new overall state apparatus', and 'annexation of large parts of its territory to newly formed territorial units, especially to Belarus, Ukraine and the Don Province'. For Ukraine, by contrast, 'the creation of its own statehood' was recognized as desirable. Rosenberg expressed himself in a similar vein on the eve of the war:

Today, we are not mounting a 'crusade' against Bolshevism simply in order to free 'the poor Russians' from this Bolshevism for all time. No, it is in order to pursue German policy and to secure the safety of the German Reich ... A war aimed at creating an indivisible Russia is therefore ruled out. Replacing Stalin with a new tsar or even appointing a nationalist leader would serve precisely to mobilise all the energies [of the population] in these territories against us.²⁰

Germany thus went to war with the USSR without any articulated political concept for the giant expanse to the east of Ukraine and to the north of the Caucasus. Hitler had formulated only the basic principles: to control and manage the territory, to exploit its resources, and to prevent 'the formation to the west of the Urals of a power capable of waging war'.²¹ It is understandable that in such initial circumstances, and against the background of the military successes of 1941, any proposals for the political reconstruction of Russia (these were coming both from the émigrés who despite an official ban²² had made their way into Russia, and also from Soviet generals²³ held as prisoners of war) were simply ignored.

²⁰ Rede des Reichsleiters A. Rosenberg vor den engsten Beteiligten am Ostproblem am 20.6.1941 (Document 1058-PS, IMT, Vol. XXVI).

²¹ Aktenvermerk vom 16.7.1941. (Document 221-L, IMT, Vol. XXXVIII).

²² Under a decree by Hitler on 25 July 1941, 'entry into the occupied territory by emigrants of all types' was forbidden. See: OKW/WFST/Abt. L (IV/Qu), betr. Einreisen von Emigranten und Beauftragters des Vatikan in die neu besetzten Ostgebiete, Nr.01502/41 geh., 25.07.1941 // Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg (hereafter BA-MA), RW4/329.

²³ Significant statements include, for example, those by the émigré professor of Königsberg University Nikolai Arsen'ev, who went to serve as an interpreter in the Wehrmacht and who declared in November 1941: 'It is essential to form a national government, in order to restore the earlier unity with the Russian people.' See: G. Wunder 'Bericht über die Fahrt zu den Zaren Schlössern im November 1941' // Tsentral'nii derzhavnii arkhiv vishchikh organiv vladi ta upravlinnia Ukraïni (hereafter TSDAVO). F. 3676. Op. 1. D. 149. L. 393.

Several Soviet generals expressed themselves in the same vein. Pavel Artemenko declared on 2 October 1941: 'The proclamation by the Reich of a Russian national government could smash Bolshevism. But the dismembering of Russia has to be avoided.' See: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv (hereafter RGVA). F. 1387. Op. 1. D. 104. L. 39. Mikhail Lukin declared on 14 December 1941: 'If an alternative Russian government were established ... such a government could become a hope for the people.' See: 'Vernehmung des General-Lt. Lukin' // Bundesarchiv, Berlin (hereafter BA) R6/77.

Initial Forms of Collaboration

Whether members of the various nationalities of the USSR collaborated with the occupiers was determined by several factors that tended to reinforce one another. After the October Revolution and the bloody Civil War, the Bolsheviks transformed the country in line with their ideas. The new state brought benefits in the form of free education and healthcare, while a new degree of social mobility became possible and career opportunities opened up.

At the same time, the 'campaigns' of the Soviet authorities, dekulakization and collectivization resulted in millions of victims among the peasants who made up the majority of the country's population.²⁴ Adding to this traumatizing experience were militant atheism, the physical annihilation of adherents of religious cults, and the 'Great Terror' of the second half of the 1930s.²⁵ Forming the background to these harsh and turbulent social changes was hunger, with the majority of the population affected by severe food shortages.²⁶ In this way significant numbers of hidden opponents of the Soviet regime came into being – opponents whom the party leadership had created through its own actions.

The Nazi attack laid bare all the problems and crises with which Soviet society was afflicted. Exacerbating the adverse trends were heavy losses suffered in the battles in the border regions. Despite stubborn resistance mounted by Red Army troops, and losses inflicted on the advancing Wehrmacht in the summer of 1941, the RKKa (The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army) by the autumn was on the verge of utter destruction. By December 3,350,000 Soviet soliders had been captured, of whom 1,400,000 had already died. By 1 February 1942 the death toll had reached 60 per cent of the total number of captives.²⁷ Although some historians have cited different data from the pioneering work of Christian Streit,²⁸ almost no one now disputes that the extermination of war prisoners was a deliberate act, proceeding from the Nazis' concept of what it meant to 'subjugate the eastern territories'.

²⁴ On collectivization see: *Tragediia sovetskoï derevni. Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie. V 5 tt.* (Moscow, 2000–6).

²⁵ On 'purges' in the Red Army see: Oleg Suvenirov, 1937. *Tragediia Krasnoï Armii* (Moscow, 2009).

²⁶ On the everyday life of Soviet citizens see: Elena Osokina, *Za fasadom 'stalinskogo izobiliiia'* (Moscow, 2008).

²⁷ Christian Streit, *'Oni nam ne tovarishchi...'* (Moscow, 2009), p. 143.

²⁸ Robert B. Bernheim, *The Commissar Order and the Seventeenth German Army: From Genesis to Implementation, 30 March 1941 – 31 January 1942* (Montreal, 2004), pp. 26–7.

Fear, and the desire to avoid death from hunger, were undoubtedly among the pillars supporting collaboration. This was acknowledged by former collaborators themselves. Thus Vladimir Valiuzhenich, who during the war served both in the Wehrmacht and in the propaganda apparatus, frequently singled out the additional rations as a motivating factor. In his recollections of the time he spent in Camp XIII-D in Hammelburg, he spoke repeatedly of the 'bowl of soup' for which comrades were betrayed, and for which people joined the camp guard force.²⁹ A further example is provided by the main ideologue of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA) Miletii Zыkov, who sought to dissuade Lieutenant-General Andrei Vlasov from accepting command over the Eastern Troops of the Wehrmacht (*Osttruppen*), since in that case he would be at the head of 'hirelings who had pulled on the German uniform for the sake of a bowl of soup'.³⁰

As early as the first weeks of the war, in the summer of 1941, Soviet citizens began appearing in the Wehrmacht. The first and most numerous category consisted of *Hilfswillige* or HiWi – 'volunteer helpers' whom the Germans from the beginning called 'our Ivans' or 'our Russians'. Soviet prisoners who expressed a wish to remain with German units, as well as deserters, were used for support work as drivers, cooks, ammunition carriers, messengers, sappers and so forth. Iurii Vladimirov, despite having surrendered in May 1942, was left by the Germans in a kitchen after being interrogated, and helped prepare food for German soldiers, while also receiving food himself. The German soldiers, strange as it might seem, were perfectly friendly. Other comrades of Vladimirov transported goods and repaired roads.³¹ By the middle of the war the Wehrmacht had become genuinely dependent on this contingent; together with the 6th Army that was encircled in Stalingrad, for example, were 51,780 Soviet citizens who were employed in support roles.³²

It was in the mid-summer of 1941 that the first armed formations of Soviet citizens began to appear. For the most part, these sub-units were only allowed to take part in combat 'unofficially', with the sanction of German commanders at the lower and middle levels. Georgii Chavchavadze, who had gone to Germany in 1938 and in 1940 had

²⁹ Hoover Institution Archives, Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection (hereafter HIA, Nicolaevsky Collection; cited on microfilm in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich), Box 472, Folder 31; Vlad. Kerzhak (Valiuzhenich), 'Stalag 13D', in *Novoe russkoe slovo*. New York (28.08.1949). Cited by a copy in BA-MA Msg 2/17825.

³⁰ Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Widener Library, Harvard University (hereafter HPSSS). Schedule B, Vol. 11, Case 391.

³¹ Iurii Vladimirov, *Kak ia byl v nemetskom plenu* (Moscow, 2007), pp. 149–50.

³² Rüdiger Overmans, 'Drugoy lik voiny: zhizn' i gibel' 6-y armii', in *Stalingrad. Sobytiye. Vozdeystvie. Simvol* (Moscow, 1995), p. 463.

graduated from a military college, served in the summer of 1941 with the LVI Panzer Corps. In August the corps headquarters was surrounded by a Soviet division near the village of Soltsy. At that point there were about 200 prisoners attached to the headquarters staff. Chavchavadze stated that he managed to have weapons distributed to the prisoners, and they joined in defending the corps headquarters. From among these people, Chavchavadze later established a reconnaissance squad.³³

In late August and early September,³⁴ a sub-unit for the fight against partisans (*Partisanenbekämpfungsgruppe*) was formed out of émigré translators and former Red Army soldiers, on the basis of the Ninth Reinforced Company of the 18th Infantry Regiment of the Sixth Infantry Division. The task of this unit was to 'compel the Russian population and the partisans to cease their resistance, if necessary by force'; it was decreed that the measure was an experiment.³⁵ The company was subordinated directly to the operations section (Ia – *Führungsabteilung*) of the staff of the German 9th Army. In command of the company was First Lieutenant Georg Tietjen, but the effective leadership was provided by the Russian emigrant Aleksandr Zaustinskiĭ,³⁶ who before the revolution had graduated from the Nikolaevskoe Cavalry School and had served in the Moscow Leib-Dragoon Regiment. Zaustinskiĭ had come from Paris as a translator. Of the company's soldiers, the first fifty had come from a

³³ Georgii Chavchavadze, 'O Russkom Osvoboditel'nom Dvizhenii', in *Materialy po istorii Russkogo osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia. Vyp. 2* (Moscow, 1998), p. 407.

³⁴ According to one of the specialists, the unit was formed in the town of Velizh in late August. See: Konstantin Semenov, 'Belyi krest O.A. Geshvenda', in *Ezhegodnik Doma russkogo zarubezh'ia*, 2015, ed. N. Gritsenko (Moscow, 2016), pp. 263–4.

³⁵ AOK 9, Kriegstagebuch Ia, record from 14 September 1941 // National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (hereafter NARA). T-312. R. 281. The 'History of the sixth Infantry Division' (Horst Großmann, *Geschichte der reinisch-westfälischen 6. Infanterie-Division 1939–1945* [Bad Nauheim, 1958], p. 60) indicates that the 9th Company was assigned the special task of fighting against 'parachutists and Komsomol members in the German rear' as early as mid-August. The earlier date is also given in a number of secondary sources. See, for example: Johannes Nicolaas Houterman, *Eastern Troops in Zeeland, The Netherlands, 1943–1945. Hitler's Osttruppen in the West* (Bayside, NY, 1997), pp. 78–9. It may be that the September entry in the KTB AOK 9 simply legalised a formation that already existed in practice.

³⁶ Nikolai Breshko-Breshkovskii, '"Bol'shoi kapitan." Rotmistr Zaustinskiĭ i ego bor'ba s krasnymi partizanami', in *Za Rodinu, Pskov* (20.12.1942, No. 88), p. 4. It should be noted that in the journal of the 9th Army's military actions the sub-unit is also referred to as 'the group of Cavalry Captain Zaustinskiĭ' (*Partisanenbekämpfungsgruppe des Rittmeisters Saustinski* in AOK 9, Kriegstagebuch Ia, record from 25 September 1941 // NARA. T-312. R. 281) and as 'the Tietjen group' (*Eingreifgruppe Tietjen* in AOK 9, Kriegstagebuch Ia, record from 1 December 1941 // *ibid.*).

prisoner-of-war camp.³⁷ On 25 September the group went into action for the first time.³⁸

There was nothing fortuitous about the formation of such a detachment. It is now known that the 9th Army included more than 100 White emigrants, serving as translators. One who had been in charge of recruiting translators was *Sonderführer* 'K'³⁹ Boris von Karzoff, who served as a translator in the intelligence section (Ic – *Feindnachrichten*) of the 9th Army, and also as personal translator to Colonel-General Adolf Strauss, who commanded the army until 15 January 1942.⁴⁰

A businessman in civilian life, the 44-year-old von Karzoff also spoke Polish. In mid-May 1941 he was already part of the 9th Army staff.⁴¹ It was his influence, and his acquaintanceship with Strauss, that made the setting up of the anti-partisan detachment possible, as participants in the formation acknowledged after the war. Despite the fact that partisan activity had declined in October and November in the zone where the army was positioned, the army commander issued an order on 12 November providing for the creation of a further five sub-units for the anti-partisan fight. These sub-units were to be made up of translators and of freed prisoners of war; the order noted that although it was not yet time to make an assessment of Tietjen's group, for the time being the detachment was acting in a disciplined fashion and in line with orders.⁴²

³⁷ On 20 September 1941 the group consisted of fifty-five soldiers and of three translators who were commanding them. See: Gruppe Tietjen an Kdt.d.rückw.A.-Geb. Abt. Qu. 16.08.1942 (hereafter Tietjen report) // Archiv des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte, München (hereafter IfZ) MA 901.

³⁸ AOK 9, Kriegstagebuch Ia, record from 25 September 1941 // NARA. T-312. R. 281. In an anonymous entry preserved in the archive of Sven Steenberg, the date and place of the group's first operation is recorded as '*Ssloboda 10 Okt*'. // Item 186 in BA-MA Msg 2/17807.

³⁹ Civilian specialists who were sent into the forces temporarily, until the army could recruit or train its own specialist personnel to carry out their duties. While not cadre soldiers themselves, the *Sonderführer* used their expert knowledge in military service. They held their posts on an authorised basis, and were assigned ranks equivalent to those of military personnel. There were thus the ranks of *Sonderführer* 'Z' (*Zugführer*), the commander of a platoon, usually a lieutenant, and *Sonderführer* 'K' (*Kompanieführer*), the commander of a company, usually a captain.

⁴⁰ Evgenii Fedorov, *Pravda o voennom Rzheve* (Rzhev, 1995), pp. 48–9, 200.

⁴¹ Tsentral'nyi arkhiv Ministerstva oborony RF (hereafter TsAMO). F. 500. Op. 12454. D. 28. L. 205.

⁴² AOK 9, Kriegstagebuch Ia, record from 12 November 1941 // NARA. T-312. R. 281. It should be noted that on 16 October the head of the General Staff of the 9th Army, Colonel Kurt Weckmann, who had patronized the experiment, was beaten up by two 'Russian thugs, probably commissars', suffering concussion and several knife wounds. He was soon evacuated for treatment in Germany, and did not return to his post. See: Telegram to the Head of General Staff of Army Group Centre, 19 October 1941 //

By November Zaustinskii's formation consisted of 330 enlisted men (six companies) and fifteen translator-commanders.⁴³ Unofficially, the participants called themselves the 'White Cross detachments'.⁴⁴ Early in December the army command ordered the corps under its authority to form detachments for similar purposes and on the same model.⁴⁵

A number of soldiers of the 6th Infantry Division later recalled Tietjen's company and the fierce struggle it conducted against partisans in late 1941.⁴⁶ Aiding in the first successes was the fact that in the autumn and winter of 1941 the partisans operated in small squads; German officers compared the fight against them to a 'war against Indians'.⁴⁷ As well as combating partisans, the unit also fought against regular formations of the Red Army near Rzhev and Moscow, taking heavy casualties (105 men were killed or wounded in the winter battles).⁴⁸ One of the émigré translators, Oleg Geshvend, wrote:

The units fought boldly against opponents who often outnumbered them. There could not have been better proof of their courage and resolve. Their losses, however, were also great. Large numbers were killed or wounded, with the latter often dying from their wounds in the heavy frosts. But the volunteers stood, fought and did not flinch.⁴⁹

The commanders of the 'White Cross' urged the Germans to proclaim a provisional government in Smolensk, and to declare the city the 'provisional capital of free Russia'. In a very narrow circle, this idea met with approval. But when Strauss departed from his post and the leadership of Army Group Centre was replaced, the idea of political collaboration died away. Nevertheless, military collaboration continued. In March 1942 Tietjen's group, with 900 men, was placed at the disposal of the 582nd Rear District (*Korück*); by August, the group numbered 2,000.⁵⁰ Translator-commanders were being recruited in the milieu of the Russian emigration in Paris.⁵¹

The tactics used earlier for fighting against the partisans, who now had larger formations of as much as battalion strength, were no longer

TsAMO. F. 500. Op. 12454. D. 160. L. 145; AOK 9, Kriegstagebuch Ia, records from 16 and 25 October 1941.

⁴³ Tietjen report.

⁴⁴ Oleg Svetlov, 'Bratstvo Belogo Kresta', in *Bor'ba* (November 1979, No. 75), p. 80.

⁴⁵ AOK 9, Kriegstagebuch Ia, record from 1 December 1941 // NARA. T-312. R. 281.

⁴⁶ Heinrich Haape, *Moscow Tram Stop: A Doctor's Experiences with the German Spearhead in Russia* (London, 1957), pp. 190–1.

⁴⁷ Kdt.d.rückw.A.-Geb.582 an AOK 9, 15.06.1942 // IFZ MA 901.

⁴⁸ Tietjen report. This description of the unit also stated: 'In the most difficult conditions (encirclement by the Reds), the companies showed exemplary tenacity.'

⁴⁹ Oleg Geshvend, 'Dobrovol'tsy Belogo kresta' // Arkhiv Doma russkogo zarubezh'ya. F. 1. Op. F-2. D. M-81. L. 10. We thank Konstantin Semenov (Russia) for his kind help with this source.

⁵⁰ Tietjen report.

⁵¹ N. Staritskiĭ, 'Pervaia vstrecha s Vlasovym', in *Dobrovolets* (August 1954, No. 20), p. 4.

yielding results. Both the occupation policies of the Nazis and shock at the crimes they were committing undoubtedly affected the moods of the members of Tietjen's formation.⁵² Finally, in early August 1942, there came an order to recall all the émigré translators from Tietjen's group.⁵³

The collaboration between White émigrés and Soviet POWs was also facilitated by German intelligence (Abwehr). In September 1941 there was an intelligence school established in Valga (southern Estonia) where émigrés were being trained, and later joined by Soviet POW volunteers. The graduates were deployed to the Soviet rear as spys and saboteurs. The school was supervised by Major Max Hemprich and Sonderführer 'K' Boris Smyslovskii from the Ic section of Army Group North based in Pskov.⁵⁴

The occupiers, however, were not to have such success with all the initial formations. On 5 December a detachment of sixty men, intended for the fight against partisans, was created from among prisoners of war held in a camp in Rzhev. It was headed by an émigré, the former captain in the tsarist army Andrei Podramentsev. The latter chose his troops personally, walking along the ranks of prisoners and selecting ones who appeared healthy. Present at the opening of the detachment's mess-room were the Mayor of Rzhev, Petr Safronov and the police chief Mitrofan Lapin. With thirty horses, two Maxim machine-guns and nine submachine-guns at its disposal, the detachment saw action on the occupied territory of the Rzhev, Olenino and Belyi regions. In practice, Podramentsev's group had been established as an attachment to the 253rd Infantry Division, and was subordinate to it. But the formation proved unreliable; in March 1942 most of its troops deserted, and the unit was disbanded.⁵⁵ The Germans returned to the question of establishing a 'Russian company' only in late September 1942, subsequently forming the '253rd Eastern Battalion'.⁵⁶

The establishing of the White Cross detachments also included an unsuccessful example.⁵⁷ In October 1941 the former colonel in the tsarist army Georgii Sakiritch arrived from Paris as a translator for

⁵² 'The way in which Fegelin's group treated civilians, as when the entire population, including women and children, were shot in occupied villages that were not putting up resistance, had an oppressive impact on the Russian soldiers, who declared that if such cases were repeated they would refuse to take part in battles.' See: Tietjen an Kdt.d.rückw.A.-Geb.582. 12.06.1942 // IfZ MA 901.

⁵³ Verfügung des Kdt.d.rückw.A.-Geb.582. 05.08.1942 // IfZ MA 899.

⁵⁴ A. Nesterov, 'Gorbun i ego komanda', in *Armeiskie chekisty* (Leningrad, 1985), pp. 60–4.

⁵⁵ Evgenii Fedorov, *Pravda o voennom Rzheve*, pp. 37–8; Christoph Rass, 'Menschenmaterial': *Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision, 1939–1945* (Paderborn, 2003), p. 273.

⁵⁶ For more details on the battalion see: Die landeseigenen Verbände im Osten und die besonderen Verhältnisse beim Ost-Batl. 253 // TsAMO. F. 500. Op. 12454. D. 376. L. 42–49.

⁵⁷ Svetlov, 'Bratstvo Belogo Kresta', p. 84.

the 9th Army. In November and December 1941 he began forming his own detachment from the POW camp at Sytchevka. The conditions under which the prisoners were held in the camp were appalling. Morozov, formerly a Red Army soldier in the 259th Rifle Regiment of the 179th Rifle Division, recalled that every evening as many as 2,000 men were driven with sticks into a single shed. It was impossible even to sit down; standing on their feet, the prisoners died of exhaustion. They were fed once a day, and medical assistance was not provided even to the severely wounded. Enlisting in Sakiritch's detachment, Morozov became the company's sergeant-major, but created a secret group in the detachment that began preparing to desert to the side of the Red Army. On 2 February 1942 (according to other accounts, 3 February), Sakiritch was killed by a Red Army reconnaissance party. Morozov then gave the order to kill another White Guard, Lieutenant Meshcherskiĭ, after which the whole detachment crossed over to units of the Red Army, having seized three machine-guns, forty rifles, five cases of cartridges, forty-three grenades and thirteen horses with carts.⁵⁸

Perhaps most astonishing of all in the early months of Soviet collaboration was that there existed a limited cooperation with the SS, which began towards the end of 1941. The first recruits were POWs who had been sent to the Trawniki camp and there became auxiliary police guards as early as September 1941. In the years to follow, at least 4,750 men came through the ranks of these 'Guard Forces of the SS and Police Leader in the Lublin District'. These SS guards actively participated in the physical extermination of Soviet Jews.⁵⁹

Military collaboration only became formalized on 22 December 1941 when the OKW, with Hitler's approval, sanctioned the creation of Armenian, Georgian, Caucasian Muslim and Turkestani legions.⁶⁰ The first formations of Caucasian and Turkestani in fact already existed in November 1941,⁶¹ yet the initiative was only in full swing by the spring of 1942.

⁵⁸ An NKVD report to the State Defence Committee detailing the defection of four armed units created by the Germans from Soviet POWs to the fight against partisans. 27 March 1942. Personal archive of the authors.

⁵⁹ Peter Black, 'Foot Soldiers of the Final Solution: the Trawniki Training Camp and Operation Reinhard', in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (2011, Vol. 25, Issue 1), pp. 1–99.

⁶⁰ Patrik von zur Mühlen, *Zwischen Hakenkreuz und Sowjetstern; der Nationalismus der sowjetischen Orientvölker im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf, 1971), pp. 58, 59.

⁶¹ These first units stood with the 444th Security Division, see: Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht. Hitlers ausländische Helfer beim 'Kreuzzug gegen den Bolschewismus' 1941–1945* (Berlin, 2007), p. 232.

Propaganda against the USSR. *Novoe Slovo*

Although the number of Russians in Germany declined by more than two-thirds after the Nazis came to power,⁶² more than 10,000 Russian emigrants were still living in Berlin at the end of the 1930s. Church services were held in Russian, and Russian theatre and concerts were organized. On 21 June 1941, on the very eve of the attack on the USSR, the oldest Russian restaurant in Berlin, the 'Medved', reopened.⁶³

Since 1934 the only Russian-language newspaper published in Germany had been *Novoe Slovo* ('New Word'), overseen and financed by the Office of Foreign Affairs of the Nazi Party (*Außenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP*).⁶⁴ For years *Novoe Slovo* was a subsidized publication with a derisory circulation,⁶⁵ whose main content consisted of anti-Bolshevik and anti-Semitic materials. However, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the war that began immediately afterward changed the situation dramatically. Following the occupation of Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands and France and the closure of Russian newspapers in these countries, the role of the leading newspaper of the Russian emigration automatically devolved to *Novoe Slovo*; as a result, the size, circulation and, of course, the influence of the newspaper increased. The tone also changed with open attacks on the USSR now deemed inappropriate and, as a result, the newspaper's content from 1939 and 1940 became a curious conglomerate. Accounts of military actions and reports from the occupied countries both complimentary to the Germans appeared alongside the earlier anti-semitic rhetoric now aimed at the Western adversaries. Even more tellingly there were full-page reprints from Soviet newspapers. Among these were speeches by the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, and reports from the territories annexed by the USSR.

Immediately after the German attack on the USSR, *Novoe Slovo* of course resumed its earlier discourse. On 23 June an extraordinary issue appeared, proclaiming a 'Crusade against Bolshevism' under Hitler's leadership, and the beginning of a 'fight against the devil'.⁶⁶ The

⁶² 150,000 in 1927; 45,000 in 1937. See: Bettina Dodenhoeft, 'Laßt mich nach Rußland heim. Russische Emigranten in Deutschland von 1918 bis 1945' (Frankfurt, 1993), p. 10.

⁶³ Advertisement in the newspaper *Novoe slovo. Berlin* (15.06.1941, No.24), p. 8.

⁶⁴ Jahresbericht des Hauptschriftleiters Despotuli der Zeitung 'Nowoje slovo' vom 09.01.1939 // BA NS8/217.

⁶⁵ 'At the end of 1936 the number of subscribers serviced by the Berlin postal administration was 356, and at the end of 1937, some 460; at the end of 1938, it stood at 710.' See: Jahresbericht des Hauptschriftleiters Despotuli.

⁶⁶ *Novoe slovo. Berlin* (23.06.1941, No. 26), p. 1, 2.

newspaper's earlier restraint was explained as a tactical necessity, while now, finally, 'the call has rung out to join in battle against the Sanhedrin of international Judeo-communist forces'.⁶⁷ The Berlin Archimandrite Ioann (*Shakhovskoi*) compared the German offensive to an operation by a skilful surgeon, who would save Russia from 'the international atheist force that has ensconced itself in the Kremlin'.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the official of the *Außenpolitisches Amt* Georg Leibbrandt, who headed the 'politics' department in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (*Ostministerium*), continued to keep watch over *Novoe Slovo*, and did not allow it any political liberties. The newspaper provided no answer to the question of what should follow the 'surgical operation', if one leaves aside obscure arguments concerning a 'need to construct a New Russia'. It is also significant that *Novoe Slovo*, in complete accord with Rosenberg's instructions, spoke out categorically against any return by emigrants to Russia, limiting those with the right to return to a mysterious group who had earned this privilege through 'their work, their political discipline, and their self-sacrifice'.⁶⁹

Military Propaganda and Prisoners of War

In the matter of military propaganda, the 'framework of the possible' was somewhat broader. Until the autumn of 1944 all the promises by the German side concerning Russia's political future were voiced only in this context – that is, they played a propagandist and not a political role. In September 1941 the former official of the German consulate in Moscow Otto-Heinrich Meissner urged that a fictitious 'conspiracy of Russian nationalist officers' be invented within the Red Army, and that a propaganda attack be mounted on this basis.⁷⁰ Meissner evidently was not aware that two 'secret radio stations', supposedly making clandestine transmissions from the territory of the USSR, had been making daily broadcasts since late June. The first of these, Concordia V, was acting in the guise of a 'Leninist old guard', supposedly 'fighting

⁶⁷ Vlad. Despotuli, 'Bor'ba s D'iavolom', in *Novoe slovo. Berlin* (23.06.1941, No. 26), p. 2.

⁶⁸ Arkhimandrit Ioann, 'Blizok chas...', in *Novoe slovo. Berlin* (29.06.1941, No. 27), p. 1, 2.

⁶⁹ N. Savelov, 'Na belom kone', in *Novoe slovo. Berlin* (02.11.1941, No. 43), pp. 1, 2. It should be noted that the article directly contradicted other materials appearing in *Novoe Slovo*, which in almost every one of its issues in late 1941 published the impressions of émigrés who were in the USSR with the Wehrmacht or on civilian service.

⁷⁰ Lt. Dr. Meissner, 'Anregung zur Schaffung einer fingierten national-russischen Offiziersverschwörung innerhalb der Roten Armee'// BA-MA RW4/329.

against Stalinist despotism'. The second, Concordia Y, spoke in the name of 'Russian nationalists'.⁷¹

Both radio stations had been set up under the aegis of the body known as 'Vineta', a special subdivision of the Ministry of Propaganda that had been established to coordinate the preparing of leaflets, posters, radio broadcasts and so forth, and worked closely with the organization *Wehrmacht-Propaganda OKW*. As well as 'clandestine' transmissions, 'Vineta' also produced regular radio programs, broadcasting from the first months of the war in six languages (Estonian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian).⁷² For reasons of military secrecy, the work of 'Vineta' had begun only a few days before the attack on the USSR, and as a result, both the personnel and the propaganda of the initial period were haphazard, the latter featuring a large element of ad libbing and improvisation. A well-established view of the German propaganda of the opening months of the war is that it was decidedly crude; a characteristic example was the clumsy and primitive⁷³ slogan, 'Hit the Kike-Bolshevik! His mug is asking for a brick!'⁷⁴

To bridge the gap between the content of the leaflets and the way they were received by Red Army soldiers fighting on the Soviet side, it was decided to recruit prisoners of war to produce pro-German propaganda.⁷⁵ Formally, these people were inmates of Berlin's *Stalag* III-D, but they enjoyed substantial privileges compared with run-of-the-mill prisoners; they were even allowed to move about the streets of Berlin, though under escort.⁷⁶ They were assigned special five-digit numbers, beginning with '15'.⁷⁷ The selection of members of the group seems to have been quite arbitrary; the initial goal was to come up with a small selection of war prisoners that would include members of various nationalities inhabiting the USSR, of all military ranks from general to private.

The prisoners of war of the '15 series' suffered a variety of fates. In some cases (those of Colonel Georgii Antonov, Colonel Andrei Nerianin

⁷¹ Ortwin Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz. Deutsche Propaganda gegen die Rote Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 35, 36.

⁷² Heinrich Kurz, 'Vineta' // IfZ ZS 412.

⁷³ In the view of the official of the Wehrmacht propaganda section Nikolaus von Grote, this primitivism was influenced by directives coming from higher up. See: Dr. Nikolaus v. Grote, 'Die WPr-Abteilung des OKW und die Wlassow-Frage' // IfZ ZS 404.

⁷⁴ 'Bei zhida-politruka, rozha prosit kirpicha!' For the original, see: Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz*, p. 100.

⁷⁵ 'In mid-August 1941, the first Soviet prisoners of war were attached to Vineta.' Kurz, 'Vineta.'

⁷⁶ A. Malakhovskii, 'Ia videl Gitlera', in *Propaganda booklet 'Chto my videli v Germanii. Plemnye krasnoarmeitsy rasskazyvaiut'* ([Berlin, 1941?]), pp. 31, 32.

⁷⁷ 'Teilnehmerliste sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener' // BA R55/21462.

and Private German Akhminov) their collaboration with the Nazis lasted effectively until the end of the war. Others (Captain Vladimir Ustinov, and Third-Rank Commissary Sergei Torskiĭ) despite their active collaboration were later returned to ordinary prisoner-of-war camps, where they subsequently died. Still others (General Filipp Ershakov and Senior Lieutenant Iakov Dzhugashvili)⁷⁸ refused to collaborate and were immediately returned to their former camps. In 1943 at least one of the prisoners of the '15 series', Lieutenant Grigorii Konovalenko, took part in an underground anti-Nazi organization; after being exposed he was arrested by the Gestapo and, from all appearances, executed.

From 3 August 1941 the Wehrmacht propaganda department published a weekly newspaper for Soviet prisoners, entitled *Klich* ('The Call'). The fourth page of this consisted of letters from so-called *plenkors* (from *plennyi korrespondent* – prisoner correspondent). For lack of letters coming 'spontaneously' to the editors, the role of *plenkors* had to be assumed by the prisoners of the '15 series'; until June 1942 they were the authors of most of the texts that condemned the horrors of Soviet life, that mocked Stalin and his cronies, and that extolled the system and way of life they had encountered in Germany. Discussion of political topics was not encouraged; only one of the letters mentions the future of Russia as part of 'a new Europe in which the Great German nation will hold the leading place'.⁷⁹

By the end of December 1941 the '15 series' group of war prisoners had been broken up. Some of the unsuccessful propagandists were returned to ordinary camps, while some entered a school for propagandists⁸⁰ organized in the Berlin suburb of Wuhlheide (the 'veterans' of the group later became instructors in the school). A few people were officially transferred to 'Vineta', including as staff of the radio station 'the Leninist old guard'.⁸¹ At the same time, the first Soviet civilians began appearing in 'Vineta': the well-known actor Vsevolod Bliumental' – Tamarin,

⁷⁸ The elder son of Josif Stalin, Iakov Dzhugashvili, was taken prisoner on 16 July 1941. After an initial interrogation at which he proved relatively talkative (see record of interrogation 18.07.1941 in Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii. F.45. Op.1. D.1554. L.8–39), the German propagandists had the idea of not just making use of him for their purposes (with photographs of him on leaflets), but also of involving him directly in propaganda measures. In Berlin, however, Iakov Dzhugashvili refused to collaborate, and he was sent to the officers' camp at Hammelburg.

⁷⁹ V/plennyi № 15014, polkovnik A[ntonov], 'Nashi nadezhdy na budushchee', in *Klich. Berlin* (12.07.1942, No. 26), p. 4.

⁸⁰ 'Wuhlheide amounted to a barracks, surrounded with barbed wire, in a camp for French prisoners next to a railway station. In December 1941 it held about 50 Soviet [prisoners].' Letter from G. von der Ropp to S. Steenberg, 14 April 1966 in BA-MA, Msg 2/17805.

⁸¹ Igor' Bogolepov, *V otmshchenie za Madrid* (Self-published, 1977), pp. 131–4.

who had crossed over to the German side near Moscow, and the civil servant Igor Bogolepov-Niman, who had not managed to be evacuated from Tallinn. But most of the staff of 'Vineta' (by the end of 1942 their number had grown to several hundred people) consisted, as before, of emigrants.⁸²

As early as February 1942 it became clear to officials of the *Ostministerium* 'on the basis of interrogations of prisoners of war ... and statements by members of the civilian population' that the question of the 'future fate' of the provinces conquered by the Wehrmacht needed answering.⁸³ The idea thus arose of involving a 'Russian de Gaulle' in the form of a Soviet general acting on the German side and heading 'Russian national formations' or even a fictitious government. The particular reservation was expressed that the use of such formations at the front would scarcely be significant militarily ('the German Wehrmacht has no need of outside support'). Nevertheless, it would exert strong propaganda pressure on soldiers of the Red Army.⁸⁴ Cast in the role of the 'Russian de Gaulle' was the former military commandant of Moscow, General Mikhail Lukin.⁸⁵ The idea found warm support in the Wehrmacht propaganda department, but an attempt by Rosenberg to put it to Hitler, even in an extremely mild form, was quashed.⁸⁶

The Russian People's Labour Party

The first attempts at political collaboration with the Nazis emerged in the Hammelburg prisoner-of-war camp. In August 1941 a Committee for the Struggle against Bolshevism was founded in the officers' camp XIII-D; later, this formed the basis for the Russian People's Labour Party (*Russkaia trudovaia narodnaia partiia* – RTNP). The leaders of the party were drawn from among imprisoned RKKA commanders. Its head was the former military prosecutor of the 100th Rifle Division, Military Jurist III Rank Semen Mal'tsev,⁸⁷ and on the German side, the party was

⁸² A notable figure among them was Sergei, the brother of the famous writer Vladimir Nabokov.

⁸³ 'Notiz von v. Grote "De Gaulle" 4-3-42' (handwritten title) // BA R6/77.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Otto Bräutigam, 'Ereignisse und Gestalten der deutschen Ost-Politik' // IfZ ZS 400/2. As in the case of Iakov Dzhugashvili, the German officials evidently took their lead from Lukin's first interrogation, in which he expressed a certain antipathy to the Soviet regime (BA R6/77). Later, however, General Lukin consistently refused any collaboration.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Otto Bräutigam, *So hat es sich zugetragen... Ein Leben als Soldat und Diplomat* (Würzburg, 1968), pp. 478, 479.

⁸⁷ In some sources he is identified mistakenly as 'Viktor'. His actual name was Semen. See: TsAMO. F. 56. Op. 12220. D. 61.

overseen by the counter-intelligence officer Captain von Sievers and by *Sonderführer* Koch. The party had a number of departments: the propaganda department was led by Senior Lieutenant Sergei Sverchkov (later to use the pseudonym Bolkhovskoi); Major Aleksandr Filippov headed the intelligence department; and the military department was led by the former Chief of Staff of the North-Western Front Major-General Fedor Trukhin, later replaced by Major-General Ivan Blagoveshchenskii. The overall leadership of the party was exercised by its Central Committee, headed by Mal'tsev.⁸⁸

Mal'tsev and Sverchkov drew up a program in which the aims of the party were spelt out. With the help of the Germans the Soviet authorities were to be overthrown. Private property was to be restored, and a state with a democratic republican regime was to be established. The party program was published in November 1941 (according to some accounts, on the 7th, the anniversary of the October Revolution), and was distributed among the prisoners. But despite agitation, the influx of people to its ranks was small,⁸⁹ and Mal'tsev therefore resorted to a subterfuge: he announced to the prisoners that only through the RTNP could work outside the camp be obtained. Driven by the inhuman conditions under which they were held, prisoners began signing up. From among them, Mal'tsev formed labour teams to work in German factories, and also set about organizing a camp police force. The first labour team was probably formed in December; it was headed by Second Lieutenant Nikolai Golovin, one of the drafters of the RTNP program.⁹⁰

The camp was divided into two blocs on the basis of nationality; Russians were held in the first bloc, and Ukrainians and Belarusians in the second. The first bloc consisted of wooden barracks, while the second bloc was built of stone.⁹¹ Trukhin, who had become a member of the RTNP in October, was appointed to head the camp. In November he drew up regulations for the military department, worked out a scheme for its activity, and also urged the Germans to set up a military force composed of prisoners of war that would reinforce German units. Trukhin recommended sending saboteurs to the rear lines, and using Russian

⁸⁸ *General Vlasov: istoriia predatel'stva. T. 1: Natsistskii proekt 'Aktion Wlassow'*, ed. Andrei Artizov (Moscow, 2015), p. 1027; *General Vlasov: istoriia predatel'stva. T. 2. Kn. 1: Iz sledstvennogo dela A. A. Vlasova*, ed. Andrei Artizov and Vasilii Khristoforov (Moscow, 2015), p. 345.

⁸⁹ Other data indicate that by the beginning of 1942 a third of the camp, around 1,000 men, were members of the party. See: Vlad. Kerzhak, 'Stalag 13D'.

⁹⁰ *General Vlasov: istoriia ... T. 2. Kn. 1*, p. 216, 261, 300, 301.

⁹¹ Untitled memoirs of Sergei Sverchkov, part 1 // HIA, Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 258, Folder 19. P. 7.

formations to replace German divisions in Belgium, France, Holland and the Balkans.⁹²

The Germans failed to react to Trukhin's first submission, which was also signed by Blagoveshchenskiĭ. Early in December Trukhin was transferred from Hammelburg to the camp not far from Berlin. In mid-December the remaining members of the RTNP (Blagoveshchenskiĭ, and Major-Generals Efim Zybin and Evgeniĭ Egorov) again made a recommendation. Von Sievers approved this document, editing it personally and ordering Blagoveshchenskiĭ to read it out to all the generals of the RKKA who were held in the camp. This was duly done. A number of them (Generals Nikitin, Alaverdov, Tkachenko, Prokhorov and Sotenskiĭ) refused to sign the submission, after which the first two were shot, and the rest sent to concentration camps or prisons. After von Sievers had sent the submission to Berlin, he ordered Blagoveshchenskiĭ to create four commissions to select recruits; all the prisoners of war held in the camps passed before these commissions. The recruiting commissions not only drew up lists of those willing to join an anti-Soviet army, but also unmasked communists, Jews and other anti-German elements, who were later handed over to the Germans. The lists of 'enemies of the Reich' were prepared by a certain Tsvetkov. Blagoveshchenskiĭ regarded this filtering out as a normal activity. In one example, Sverchkov prepared a denunciation of an officer named Sakovich; Blagoveshchenskiĭ then signed the denunciation, and handed it on to a German officer. The commissions recruited somewhere between 800 and 3,500 men.⁹³

The RTNP also conducted propaganda activity. Each Thursday in November and December lectures were delivered to the assembled prisoners in the camp club, under a program worked out by Trukhin. Two or three times a month a handwritten newspaper entitled *Puti Rodiny* ('Paths of the Motherland') was issued in sixteen to twenty copies; this contained surveys of military affairs compiled by Trukhin, and propaganda materials.⁹⁴

In applying to join the party, the would-be recruits presented a declaration together with an attached form, and swore their readiness to wage war on the Soviet system using any methods. In addition, they needed a recommendation from a member of the RTNP. The declarations were reviewed by an acceptance commission, and were then approved by a

⁹² *General Vlasov: istoriia predatel'stva. T. 2. Kn. 2*, ed. Andreĭ Artizov and Vasilii Khristoforov (Moscow, 2015), p. 237; *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 1*, p. 975–977.

⁹³ *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 2. Kn. 2*, p. 238–240; *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 1*, p. 1027.

⁹⁴ *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 2 Kn. 1*, p. 212, 217; *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 2 Kn. 2*, p. 112, 238; *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 1*, p. 1027.

committee of which Mal'tsev, Sverchkov and Trukhin were members. There were honorary members of the RTNP (Adolf Hitler, von Sievers and Koch), actual members, candidate members on six months' probation, and sympathizers. The members of the party greeted one another with the cry '*Slava Rossii!*' ('Glory to Russia!'), to which the reply was '*Slava soratniku!*' ('Glory to the brother-in-arms!').⁹⁵

From the time of its founding in August 1941, the committee occupied itself with exposing commissars, communists, Jews and political workers among the mass of prisoners of war. Later, this function was performed by the camp police, founded by Major Aleksandr Filippov and the ethnic-German RKKA Captain Grothuss. For practical purposes, the police were headed by Filippov. Prisoners who were declared 'enemies of the Reich' were handed over to the Germans, who stripped them of their clothes and took them from the camp. Between August 1941 and April 1942 the members of the RTNP handed over to the Germans about 2,000 men, who were later shot.⁹⁶ The activists lived in separate rooms and enjoyed better food, including unlimited quantities of soup.

Apart from this, the members of the Central Committee exploited their authority in order to rob the prisoners. People who had valuables were falsely denounced, and when they were arrested their possessions were appropriated. They were also denounced merely for the sake of additional rations. Vladimir Valiuzhenich, who was editorial secretary of the newspaper *Puti Rodiny*, was denounced by a young lieutenant who accused him of having Jewish ancestry. The Germans mounted an investigation, and the allegation was disproven, but both of those involved were beaten. As Valiuzhenich after the war described the situation, 'The price of a human life did not exceed that of a mess-tin of turnip soup.'⁹⁷ He also wrote that 'Hammelburg was the USSR squared', where thanks to the system established by Mal'tsev, food was distributed strictly according to the principle of the usefulness of one person or another to the cause of the RTNP. Mal'tsev himself was characterized by Valiuzhenich as a 'beast' and 'a foul swine', who lived in a separate room and had books, photographs, boots and plenty of food. 'It was appalling, what a hell that was. A hell created by Russians for Russians!'⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 2 Kn. 1*, p. 211, 212; Vlad. Kerzhak, 'Stalag 13D'.

⁹⁶ *General Vlasov: istoriia... T. 2 Kn. 1*, p. 302, 304, 346, 361, 362; *General Vlasov: istoriia ... T. 2 Kn. 2*, p. 91.

⁹⁷ Vlad. Kerzhak, 'Stalag 13D'.

⁹⁸ Letter of V. Berg (Valiuzhenich) to B. Nikolaevskii from 08.01.1950 // HIA, Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 472, Folder 31.

In January 1942 an epidemic of typhus broke out in the camp. About thirty members of the Central Committee of the RTNP were transferred by the Germans to isolated premises, and a quarantine was imposed on the camp, lasting until April 1942. In February 1942 the party entered into deep crisis, and disagreements began breaking out.⁹⁹ In March Mal'tsev, Filippov, Blagoveshchenskiĭ and others were moved to the Wuhlheide camp. In June 1942 the Central Committee was dissolved, and the activity of the party came to an end. Mal'tsev and Filippov were returned to Hammelburg as prisoners of war. Sverchkov, Trukhin and Blagoveshchenskii subsequently actively collaborated with the Nazis.¹⁰⁰ In the summer of 1942 the party was reborn under the supervision of *Unternehmen Zeppelin*, with Mal'tsev once again its formal leader. As of August 1942, there were 120 people in its ranks.

Propaganda in the Occupied Territories

To each of the three army groups that attacked the USSR, special propaganda sections were attached – *Ostland* (Army Group North), *Weißruthenien* (Army Group Centre), *Ukraine* (Army Group South). The tasks of these sections included both active propaganda aimed at Soviet officers and rank-and-file soldiers, and also explanatory work among the population of the occupied territories. In the field of active propaganda, it was the workers of the *Ostland* section who proved most creative; from August 1941 they issued a newspaper entitled *Pravda* ('Truth'), with its masthead so closely resembling that of the Moscow party newspaper that at first glance they could easily be confused. But in place of the traditional appeal 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!' was the summons 'Workers of all countries, unite in struggle against Bolshevism!', while instead of portraits of Stalin there were portraits of Hitler.¹⁰¹ In December 1941 the print-run of the pseudo-*Pravda* reached 257,000 copies, which underlines the significant propaganda effect of this ruse.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Kirill Aleksandrov, *Ofitserskii korpus...* (2009), pp. 86, 198, 804.

¹⁰⁰ *General Vlasov: istoriia...* T. 2 Kn. 1, p. 362; Untitled memoirs of Sergei Sverchkov, part 2 // HIA, Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 258, Folder 19. P. 1.

¹⁰¹ *Pravda. [Riga] (August 1941, no number)*, p. 1. According to the accounts of Department Ic of the administration of the rear of Army Group North, on 5 August 1941 some 50,000 copies of *Pravda* were printed in a Riga printing works, and the following day were sent to Pskov. See: 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Abteilung Ic vom 17.08.1941' // NARA. T-501. R. 2.

¹⁰² Hans Lorenz Spies, *Eine deutsche 'Pravda' – die Wahrheit aus der Hand der Wehrmacht* in www.bundesarchiv.de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/bilder_dokumente/01065/index.html.de.

An illustration of the propaganda effort that was directed at the civilian population is provided by Smolensk, which was occupied by the Wehrmacht on 16 July 1941. Three months later, workers of the *Weißruthenien* propaganda section arrived in the city, and identified the following problems as affecting the moods of the population:

1) looting by soldiers of the Wehrmacht, all the more pernicious since the peoples of the East have a heightened sense of justice and consider the Germans a cultured people, superior to them; 2) ... outrages in the eyes of the population against captured Red Army soldiers, the shooting of exhausted prisoners; 3) ... anti-Jewish actions ... because of the lack of explanations as to why such radical means are needed to solve the Jewish problem.¹⁰³

The response was to organize counter-propaganda measures (wall newspapers and placards), and explanatory work was begun. The section took over the newspaper *Smolenskii Vestnik* ('Smolensk Courier') which had appeared since mid-October under the supervision of Advance Squad W2 (*Vorausstrupp W2*)¹⁰⁴, and had been edited by Konstantin Dolgonenkov, who previously wrote for the Soviet newspaper *Rabochii Put'* ('Workers' Road'). At the beginning of November the print-run of *Smolenskii Vestnik* was only 3,000 copies,¹⁰⁵ but a month later it had increased to 11,000. Meanwhile, the newspaper had begun appearing in a large format and under the name *Novyi Put'* ('New Path'), to avoid giving the impression that it was a local Smolensk publication. Parallel editions were printed in Vitebsk (7,000 copies), Klinty (5,000 copies) and Kaluga (34,000 [!] copies).¹⁰⁶ The latter edition existed only very briefly; late in December Kaluga was recaptured by the Red Army, and the editorial office was evacuated to Smolensk.

By the end of December 1941 production of *Novyi Put'* had been handed over almost completely to a Russian editorial team, joined by a number of fortunate souls who had been freed from prisoner-of-war camps. 'The political articles too are written now by Russians who have received preliminary instruction.'¹⁰⁷ At the beginning of 1942 the

¹⁰³ 'Zur Lage und Stimmung der Bevölkerung in Stadt und Gebiet Smolensk' [end of 1941] // IfZ MA 578.

¹⁰⁴ Smolensk's mayor Boris Men'shagin stated that the idea of printing a newspaper had already been mooted in September, but the Germans imposed a condition that the newspaper to be printed in the Byelorussian language.

There were practically no Byelorussians in Smolensk, but Nazi planning mandated that the city would be incorporated into the general region *Weißruthenien*. Boris Men'shagin, *Vospominaniia o perezhitom 1941–43* // Personal archive of the authors.

¹⁰⁵ 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung W vom 1.11.1941' // IfZ MA 578.

¹⁰⁶ 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung W vom 30.11.1941', 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung W vom 15.12.1941' // IfZ MA 578.

¹⁰⁷ 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung W vom 31.12.1941' // IfZ MA 578. In these articles the inhabitants were told to avoid panic due to Red Army advance near

editorial office consisted of two Russian editors, four Russian professors and a Russian translator. Also recruited 'to influence the national minorities in the rear regions and among prisoners of war, as well as Cossack formations in the Wehrmacht' had been 'a Georgian writer,¹⁰⁸ a Cossack writer and a Mongolian editor from Kazakhstan [!]'.¹⁰⁹

By the beginning of March 1942 the print-run of *Novyi Put'*, together with the sub-editions in Vitebsk and Klinty, had reached 40,000 copies. Also published were the peasant newspaper *Kolokol* ('The Bell'), in a print-run of 200,000 copies, and the 'journal for the intelligentsia' *Na Perelome* ('At the Turning-Point'), in 5,000 copies. Meanwhile, leaflets, wall-newspapers and posters were published as well, and radio broadcasts were organized.¹¹⁰ In the course of three months the German propagandists had thus established a functioning infrastructure, staffed by Russian cadres working under German control and making it possible to conduct propaganda work over a territory of more than 100,000 sq km.

Events in other cities were following a similar scenario. In Pskov from October the newspaper *Pskovskii Vestnik* ('Pskov Courier') appeared alongside the pseudo-*Pravda*; in Orel, *Orlovskie Izvestiia* ('Orel News'), later renamed *Rech'* ('Speech'); and in Yuzovka, *Donetskii Vestnik* ('Donetsk Courier').

Civil Collaboration in Smolensk – the NTSNP

Smolensk's governing organization was created by the occupying authorities ten days after the city's seizure. It consisted predominately of staff from the local pedagogical institute, while a well-known local lawyer, Boris Men'shagin, became its mayor. The new administration had an almost insurmountable task – to try to re-establish city life under the most difficult conditions. Of the 155,000 inhabitants living in the city before the war, only 15,000 still lived there by the middle of July 1941 (later some returned and the overall number grew to 40,000).¹¹¹ Many buildings in the city were destroyed during the fighting and what remained was often confiscated by the Germans for their own use. The city administration had to house those evicted by the Germans as well as those returning to the city. There was even an attempt, although grossly inadequate, to feed

Moscow (*Novyi put'*, No. 19 18.12.1941, p. 1) and foretold of the end of bolshevism and the bringing a new life under 'the greatest architect of history Adolf Hitler' (*Novyi put'*, No. 20 21.12.1941, p. 1).

¹⁰⁸ The writer concerned was probably Shalva Soslani.

¹⁰⁹ 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung W vom 16.01.1942' // IfZ MA 578.

¹¹⁰ 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung W vom 05.03.1942' // IfZ MA 578.

¹¹¹ Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis*, p. 59.

the inhabitants.¹¹² To raise revenue taxes were placed on buildings, land, trade, etc. and from 1 September labour service was made compulsory (later to be taken over by the Germans to source workers for the war economy).¹¹³ Already at the beginning of August Smolensk's Jews were isolated and resettled to the specially created ghetto by order of the occupying power.¹¹⁴

While Men'shagin was preoccupied with the administrative issues, one of the initiatives of his deputy, Boris Basilevskii, was to disband the collective farming system. In September he wrote in detail about how this would allow the Germans to win the trust of the Russian peasant. The report reached the chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, Wilhelm Keitel, and he presented it to Hitler.¹¹⁵ There are indications that Hitler was prepared to embrace Basilevskii's initiative and, while the 'New Land Tenure Decree' (*Neue Agrarordnung*) that was published in mid-February 1942 called for an end to collective farming, in practice it supported 'communal facilities' with similar functions.¹¹⁶

The fact that Hitler himself had read Basilevskii's proposal did not save him from being called to the local SD office to be beaten with a stick for signing an antifascist proclamation that was issued in Smolensk at the outbreak of war.¹¹⁷ Indeed the domineering German presence within Smolensk included frequent displays of corporal punishment; a method of control absent from Soviet rule and a rising factor in the animosity between the city inhabitants and the collaborating authorities. Yet at the same time Men'shagin's memoirs are filled with stories of (usually anonymous) denunciations, which suggests that individual acts of collaboration were far from infrequent. Denunciations were investigated by the local SD and were typically superficial, but even the mere suspicion of guilt was enough for punishment and sometimes a capital sentence. Accordingly, at the end of 1942 two members of the *Novyi Put'* newspaper who were suspected of espionage were executed.¹¹⁸

¹¹² According to Men'shagin, 'all the inhabitants of Smolensk spent the winter of 1941–1942 half-starving'.

Boris Men'shagin, *Vospominaniia o perezhitom 1941–43* // Personal archive of the authors.

¹¹³ Order of the mayor of Smolensk No. 9 (as of 28.08.1941) and No. 13 (as of 01.09.1941). Personal archive of the authors.

¹¹⁴ Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis*, p. 79.

¹¹⁵ Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz*, p. 133.

¹¹⁶ *Pravda [Pskov] (February 1942, No. 10a)*, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Men'shagin, *Vospominaniia*; HPSSS. Schedule B, Vol. 11, Case 439.

¹¹⁸ Men'shagin, *Vospominaniia*; HPSSS. Schedule B, Vol. 11, Case 650. In details on the issue of occupation atrocities and war crimes, see: in Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis*, pp. 96–132.

An instructive example of the clash of interests between the German administrative apparatus, the White emigration and the local population is the history of the penetration of the occupied territories by the National-Labor Alliance of the New Generation (*Narodno-trudovoi soïuz novogo pokoleniia* – NTSNP), a party formed around the end of the 1920s and made up principally of second-generation émigrés (this was further ensured by an age requirement – only people born after 1895 could join) from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, France and Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁹

The pre-war ideology of the NTSNP was close to the fascist ideologies that were widespread in Europe at that time,¹²⁰ but differed from that of the Nazis in not having a racist component. The alliance called for the overthrow of the Soviet regime and for the rebirth of Russia beneath a national banner; of paramount importance were to be the interests of working people, free of capitalist or communist coercion. Before the Second World War the alliance collaborated with the Polish and Japanese intelligence forces, including sending its agents into the USSR, where most of them were unmasked by the NKVD and executed. A key role in these operations was played by Georgiï Okolovich who would later play an important role in the Smolensk administration.

Following the German attack on the USSR the NTSNP leadership, headed by Viktor Baïdalakov, took the decision to transfer the centre of its activity to Berlin, and through taking advantage of the growing need of the Nazis for Russian-speaking personnel in their organs of administration, propaganda and so forth, to promote its members in these duties. Playing the role of ‘patrons’ of the NTSNP during this period were the aforementioned Georg Leibbrandt and the editor of *Novoe Slovo*, Vladimir Despotuli.¹²¹ Members of the NTSNP thus came to work in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, in the Wehrmacht propaganda section, in ‘Vineta’, and so forth.

It was virtually impossible in some cases to tell where the NTSNP members’ own ideology finished off and where the subterfuge began. Several members of the NTSNP worked in the ‘underground’ radio stations mentioned earlier, speaking in the name of Russian nationalists

¹¹⁹ On the early history of the NTSNP (subsequently, NTS), see for example: Lev Rar, Valerian Obolenskii, *Rannie gody* (Moscow, 2003).

¹²⁰ Agreeing with this assessment were both the Soviet scholar, and later member of the NTS, N. Puzanov-Tenzerov (HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 11, Case 382) and the officer of the propaganda section W, who in March 1942 wrote a denunciation of the activity of the NTS in Smolensk (‘Über die Tätigkeit des “Nationalen Arbeiter-Bundes” im besetzten russischen Sprachgebiet’ // BA-MA, RW4/254).

¹²¹ Viktor Baïdalakov, *Da vozvelichitsia Rossiia, da gibnut nashi imena...* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 26, 28, 29.

supposedly located behind Soviet lines.¹²² Meanwhile, they were themselves Russian nationalists, and the name of their radio station, *Za Rossiïu* ('For Russia') was identical to the name of the NTSNP newspaper that had appeared in Belgrade before the war.

The activity of the NTSNP, however, was not limited to filling official posts in Berlin. Driven above all by idealistic motivations, numerous members of the NTSNP, particularly young people who had left Russia in their early childhood or who had been born abroad, sought to return to the motherland. Taking advantage of the confusion of wartime, using forged or improperly acquired documents or sometimes without any documents at all, members of the NTSNP made their way onto occupied Russian territory.¹²³ As early as October 1941 Georgiï Gandziuk, who later became Deputy Mayor of Smolensk, and Georgiï Okolovich, who worked in the transport section of the administration, coordinated the semi-legal flow of NTSNP members into the occupied territories.¹²⁴ Through Smolensk, NTSNP members thus arrived in Viaz'ma, Briansk and Orel.

In parallel with this activity, NTSNP activists sought to agitate among the local population and recruit like-minded members. But young members of the Soviet intelligentsia, having learned from the experience of the Stalin period, took a skeptical attitude to the idealism of the NTSNP adherents. A German observer noted: 'Among the ranks of Alliance members there is a definite disappointment at the fact that their ideas are not finding any particular response here.'¹²⁵ Nevertheless, there were exceptions. Another account notes as 'significant' the fact that the editor Gatskevich, as a result of joining the NTSNP, 'changed his attitude to the German official organs from initial sincere devotion to profound alienation now'.¹²⁶

At the beginning of March 1942 the local German organs turned their attention to the activity of the NTSNP members in Smolensk, sending

¹²² Dmitrii Brunst, *Zapiski byvshego emigranta* (no place of publication, 1961), pp. 15, 16.

¹²³ These extremely risky undertakings are described in numerous postwar memoirs by NTS members. See, for example: Vladimir Kashnikov, 'V Rossii, 1941–44 gg.', in *Grani* (1991, No. 162), pp. 153–76; Ariadna Shirinkina, 'Ot Belgrada do Orla', in *Posev* (1990, No. 6), pp. 137–50; Iurii Zhediliagin, 'NTS v Viaz'me v 1941–1942 godakh', in *Posev* (1984, No. 7), pp. 41–7; Sebastian Stopper, Andrei Kukatov, *Nelegal'nyi Briansk 1941–1943* (Briansk, 2014), pp. 88–91.

¹²⁴ Baïdalakov, *Da vozvelichitsia Rossiia*, p. 31; Georgiï Okolovich, 'Bor'bu protiv diktatury my schitali vseгда svoei pervoi zadachei', in *Posev* (1977, No. 2), p. 48–54; 'Über die Tätigkeit des "Nationalen Arbeiter-Bundes" im besetzten russischen Sprachgebiet' // BA-MA, RW4/254.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ 'Zur Tätigkeit des "Nationalen Arbeiter-Bundes des Neuen Generation" im besetzten russischen Gebiet' vom 27.04.42 // BA-MA, RW4/254.

several reports to Berlin. These reports pointed out quite correctly that the Great-Russian nationalist program of the NTSNP contradicted the plans of the Nazi leadership, and that although the program did not include direct attacks on Germany, it insisted that neither the Bolsheviks nor the Germans would bring deliverance to the future Russia.¹²⁷ The *Novoe Slovo* editor Despotuli had evidently been informed of the content of the reports, and addressed the NTSNP chief Baïdalakov in a puzzled letter. In reply, Baïdalakov stated that the instructions he had given his party comrades were that the NTSNP participated actively in 'the struggle by Germany and its allies against Bolshevism and its Jewish and masonic supporters'; meanwhile, former Soviet functionaries such as Dolgonenkov, the editor of the *Novyi Put'*, were cavilling against the Alliance. The correspondence, of a somewhat decorative nature, was translated into German and forwarded to the Wehrmacht propaganda section; with this, to all appearances, the matter rested. At any rate, no repressive measures were taken against Okolovich, described in the reports as an 'extremely suspicious individual and the chief conspirator of the Alliance',¹²⁸ and he continued working in Smolensk until 1943.

There is no doubt that the aims and tasks of the NTSNP were fundamentally different from the goals of the Nazi leadership, or that the cooperation with the Nazis by members of the NTSNP was dictated primarily by tactical considerations. But occupying leading posts in the local administration, the NTSNP members in practice ended up implicated both in the terror against the local population, and also in the 'settling of the Jewish question' and in other war crimes. This applies in particular to Deputy Mayor of Smolensk Gandziuk and to the head of the 2nd (Military-Political) Department of the police Nikolaï Alferchik. On the night of 15 July 1942 some 2,000 Jews were taken from the ghetto to a site near the village of Magalinshchina, where they were killed by various means. Gandziuk and Alferchik directed these executions, the most numerous to occur in the Smolensk region.¹²⁹

After the war the members of the NTSNP, adhering to party mythology, maintained that their organization restricted its involvement with German bodies on the basis of certain 'strict frameworks' that banned

¹²⁷ 'Zur Tätigkeit russischer Emigranten in Stadt und Gebiet Smolensk' // BA-MA, RW4/254.

¹²⁸ This may have been aided by the informers confusing his surname with his patronymic and calling him not Georgii Okolovich but Georgii Sergeevich.

¹²⁹ Iosif Tsynman, *Bab'i iary Smolenshchiny* (Smolensk, 2001), pp. 22, 29, 36, 39.

In his memoirs Men'shagin stated that, according to the data from the passport office, 1,003 people were killed.

members from serving as translators ‘and especially, in any kind of police organs’.¹³⁰ This does not correspond to reality.

The Lokot’ Autonomous Region

During the autumn of 1941 local security and militia groups¹³¹ began taking shape spontaneously in several provinces within the occupied territories. In the small town of Lokot’ in Orel Province such a police group formed the basis for one of the most curious episodes of collaboration on the territory of the USSR, an example that was almost unique.

The Soviet regime vanished from Lokot’ around the end of September and the beginning of October. During the first days of October scattered groups of Red Army soldiers made their way through the town, shouting that they would not fight to defend the collective farms. During the night of 3–4 October a motorized reconnaissance unit of the Seventeenth Panzer Division (the XLVII Motorized Corps of the Second Panzer Group) appeared.¹³²

Inserting himself into this vacuum of power was the technical-school physics teacher Konstantin Pavlovich Voskoboïnik. Born in 1895 into the family of a railway worker in the village of Smela, Voskoboïnik had studied in the law faculty of Moscow University in 1915 and 1916 before volunteering for the front. In 1919 he enlisted in the Red Army, but after being wounded was demobilized and went to work in a military commissariat. In 1938 he settled in Lokot’, where he began teaching. His students recalled Voskoboïnik was an exceptionally gifted orator who commanded the attention of an auditorium. The organs of the NKVD considered him a loyal Soviet citizen, though one with a high regard for his own importance.¹³³

With the arrival of the Germans, Voskoboïnik delivered a speech at the Lokot’ hospital in which he declared: ‘For 24 years we have not had the right to speak the truth, and it is only now, after we have cast off the unendurable fetters of slavery and lies, that we can deliver a curse on the scoundrel Stalin, who has drowned Russia in blood.’

¹³⁰ NTS: *mysl’ i delo 1930–2000* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 21, 22.

¹³¹ In other places, such as Leningrad Province, this was a more centralized process. See, for example: Stiven Meddoks, ‘Prestuplenie i nakazanie’, in *SSSR vo Vtoroi mirovoi voïne: Okkupatsiia. Kholokost. Stalinizm*, ed. Oleg Budnitskiĭ and Liudmila Novikova (Moscow, 2014).

¹³² Kirill Aleksandrov, ‘Prichiny i usloviia vzniknoveniia Lokotskogo okruzhnogo samoupravleniia v iugo-zapadnykh raionakh Orlovskoi oblasti osen’iu 1941 goda’, in *Voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv* (2011, No. 10), pp. 62, 63.

¹³³ Igor’ Ermolov, *Grazhdanskiĭ i voenno-politicheskii kollaboratsionizm v iuzhnykh raionakh Orlovskoi oblasti* (Orel, 2008), pp. 24, 25.

Almost immediately, a local administration was founded, with Voskoboïnik as mayor, Bronislav Kaminskiï as his deputy, Stepan Mosin as Kaminskiï's deputy in charge of administrative matters, and Roman Ivanin as police chief.¹³⁴

The chosen officials were united by their anti-Soviet convictions. The head engineer of a distillery in nearby Brasovo, Kaminskiï had suffered from the Soviet repressions of the late 1930s, spending time in exile. Like Voskoboïnik, he had avoided being evacuated with the retreating Red Army. Later, he played a key role in the history of the Lokot' region. Mosin, the principal of a secondary school in the Suzemka district, had not been in the camps or in exile, but in 1937 he had been expelled from the Communist Party for criticizing collectivization. In September 1941 he had been mobilized in the Red Army, but a month later he deserted from his unit, returned to Brasovo and quickly joined the regional administration. Ivanin, a native of Brasovo, was a shady individual; he had a criminal record, and had earlier been imprisoned for hooliganism and fraud.

It was necessary to establish a force that could be relied on. According to one report, even before the Germans arrived on 3 October Voskoboïnik had set up an armed squad of eighteen men who immediately received the name of 'people's militia'.¹³⁵ These first squads were armed only with weapons abandoned by Red Army soldiers in the Brasovo forests during their retreat. In December the police still wore civilian clothing.¹³⁶

By the end of the year small self-defence groups had been set up in the villages of the Lokot' Region. The goal was to create a 'network' in which small local groups were subordinated to a regional centre. The members of the groups did not engage in regular service; most of the time the peasants were occupied with farm work, but kept weapons in their homes and assembled on command to carry out assigned tasks.

¹³⁴ The Russian literature has traditionally asserted that the 'Administration of the Lokot' District' was officially approved by the occupation forces on 16 October (according to other sources, on 16 November). See: Sergeï Drobiazko, 'Lokotskii avtonomnyi okrug i Russkaia osvoboditel'naia narodnaia armiiia', in *Materialy po istorii Russkogo osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia*, Vyp. 2, p. 172; *Pod nemtsami*, ed. Kirill Aleksandrov (Sankt-Peterburg, 2011), p. 168. The present authors have been unable to find confirmation of this on the basis of German materials. In this context, the mention of the commander of the rear region of the Second Panzer Army (*Korück 532*) General Brand is clearly an anachronism, since the rear region itself was established only in February 1942, and prior to this Brand headed the so-called Command Staff Viaz'ma. See: Heeresgruppe Mitte, Ib, Nr.890/42 g.Kdos. 11.01.1942. Betr. Kommandostab Wjasma // TsAMO. F. 500. Op. 12454. D. 333. L. 314. It is not excluded that Voskoboïnik's appointment was confirmed by some German command body, but not on the army level.

¹³⁵ Gribkov, *Khoziain Brianskikh lesov*, pp. 18, 19, 33.

¹³⁶ Aleksandrov, 'Prichiny i usloviia vozniknoveniia', p. 65.

Voskoboinik promised a merciless fight against partisans and anyone who did not carry out his orders. A nurse who had worked in the surgical department of the town's hospital hid surgical instruments in her apartment when the Germans arrived fearing they would be stolen. Voskoboinik demanded that the instruments be handed over, to which the woman refused, calling him an impostor. The nurse was arrested, and after a brief trial, was taken to the wall of the district administration and shot.¹³⁷

Aware of the importance of propagandizing their ideas, Voskoboinik and Mosin decided to put the local printshop back in operation. On 25 November a 'Proclamation' was announced to the population that a new life had begun. This was followed by 'Order No. 1' and a manifesto of the People's Socialist Party of Russia (*Narodnaia sotsialisticheskaia partiia Rossii* – NSPR).¹³⁸

All three documents represented examples of the attempt to 'legitimize' the political demands of the collaborationists as coming 'from below'. Using simple, popular expressions, the 'Proclamation' voiced accumulated antagonism to the Soviet authorities. Described as 'an idiot of genius', and a 'Caucasian donkey', Stalin was blamed for the crimes and repressions of the 1930s. The documents also showered praise on the Wehrmacht, expressing thanks to it for 'saving us from Stalinist drudgery'. Then came a brief characterization of the Soviet system:

Freedom was trampled into the mud. Earlier, people fought for the right to speak their minds. But among us, even keeping silent wasn't allowed. Everyone had to praise the vile regime created by this Caucasian donkey. Anyone who remained silent put themselves under suspicion. People were compelled by force to peddle lies to the masses. All you could do freely was to hail Stalin, to clap your hands and humiliate yourself with praises for this cretin.¹³⁹

'Order No. 1' was addressed to soldiers and commanders of the Red Army. Voskoboinik signed it using his pseudonym of 'Engineer Zemlia', and for the first time styled himself as 'head of the People's Socialist Party'. He demanded that soldiers surrender their weapons, while anyone who resisted the order was to be 'wiped out on the spot'.¹⁴⁰

The 'Manifesto' included a party program of twelve points. At the centre of a curious ideological miscellany was the Russian peasantry. Roughly half of the points were devoted to the question of land ownership. Hence,

¹³⁷ Vasilii Khristoforov, 'Kollaboratsionisty otdel'no vziatogo Lokotskogo okruga', in *65 let Velikoi Pobedy. T. 4*, ed. S. Naryshkin and A. Torkunov (Moscow, 2010), p. 182.

¹³⁸ *Pod nemtsami*, p. 168.

¹³⁹ Ermolov, *Russkoe gosudarstvo v nemetskom tylu*, pp. 64, 65.

¹⁴⁰ *Pod nemtsami*, p. 171.

it was suggested that all arable land should be handed over free of charge for eternal, hereditary use. Every citizen of Russia was to receive a residential plot, and it was urged that citizens be provided free of charge with timber for the construction of dwellings. The size of the land allotments was set at ten hectares, and of the residential plots, at one hectare per person. The program promised an amnesty for all Komsomol members, Heroes of the Soviet Union and rank-and-file party members 'who had not defiled themselves by committing outrages against the people'; at the same time, it contained a call for 'the pitiless extermination of Jews who were former commissars'. The underlying principles were to be 'free labour, private property within limits established by the law, state capitalism supplemented and corrected through private initiative, and public spiritedness'. As symbols of the NSPR, the program specified St George and the George Cross.¹⁴¹

The leaders of the Lokot' autonomous region viewed their ideological program as a particular variant of Russian National Socialism; it was not fortuitous that in the name of the party, the words 'People's Socialist' were later changed to 'National Socialist'.¹⁴² The issuing of the manifesto was also intended to mark the beginning of a much wider campaign to publicize the NSPR in Orel, Kursk, Smolensk and Chernigov provinces. Marking this auspicious occasion, Voskoboïnik is supposed to have said: 'Do not forget that we are no longer working for Brasovo Region alone, but on the scale of all Russia. History will not forget us.' Distributed along with the manifesto were the 'Proclamation' and an 'Appeal to Partisans', in which the latter were called on to 'cease committing outrages and to join in organizing a peaceful, industrious life'.¹⁴³ By the end of 1941 Voskoboïnik had managed to establish five cells of the NSPR in Brasovo Region,¹⁴⁴ but there is so far no evidence that the campaign actually extended to the other provinces.

On Voskoboïnik's orders, Mosin visited Orel shortly before Christmas, where the staff of the German Second Army was located. Among other requests, Mosin sought permission to establish a party, but to this, the

¹⁴¹ Dallin, *Brigada Kaminskogo*, pp. 18, 19.

¹⁴² This occurred under Kaminskii. The historian Boris Nikolaevskii, however, considered that 'while attaching to himself the label of Russian Nazi, the Pole Kaminskii did not become either a Russian or a Nazi'. It may be assumed that the use made by Voskoboïnik and Kaminskii of the term 'National Socialism' was for reasons of expediency, with the aim of suggesting a familiar ideological template to the Germans, and then of filling it with whatever content the situation required. It was no accident that an observer noted of Kaminskii in April 1942 that he had 'yet to cope with the political and ideological ramifications of his ideas'. See *Pod nemtsami*, p. 477.

¹⁴³ Drobiazko, 'Lokotskii avtonomnyi okrug', p. 175; Dallin, *Brigada Kaminskogo*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁴ Ermolov, *Russkoe gosudarstvo v nemetskom tylu*, p. 71.

reply from the military authorities was evasive. Of far more interest to them was the question of Voskoboïnik's attitude to the partisans, and of whether he intended to conduct anti-partisan propaganda and to fight against them. Mosin confirmed the readiness of the group to engage in armed combat, and promised to supply information about the partisans to army intelligence.¹⁴⁵

Late 1941 was marked by a new phase in the regional partisan struggle. The former deputy head of courses for the Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Colonies of the NKVD Aleksandr Saburov formed his own partisan unit. This formation was the first to deal a serious blow to Voskoboïnik's police, laying waste to the garrison in the town of Suzemka where apart from about fifty police, there was a German command post. On 12 December the unit carried out its first attack, assassinating the Mayor Mamonenkov and three of his associates. After this operation the head of the regional police, the former White Guard officer Bogachev, was sent to Suzemka to restore order.¹⁴⁶ In all, a total of forty-one collaborators had been killed by the partisans of Orel province by 20 December.¹⁴⁷

In Lokot' on 21 December six prisoners were shot in the corridor of the prison (the one-time hostel of the Forest Chemistry Technical School). Those executed included a regimental commissar, on whom had been found a party ticket; the former Chairman of the Dubrovsk Rural Soviet, and two citizens of the settlement of Krasnyi Kolodets. All of them were shot on the orders of Voskoboïnik.¹⁴⁸ On 26 December the partisans aimed a further blow at Suzemka. This operation resulted in the deaths of Bogachev, his deputy and secretary, twenty-three German soldiers and thirty-two police. Some rich trophies were also seized: two machine guns, two submachine guns, seventy-two rifles, 12,000 cartridges, an automobile, twelve bicycles and 100 tons of grain.¹⁴⁹

Clearly impressed by the problems the partisans were starting to cause him, Voskoboïnik in late December issued an order in which he urged all the partisans to surrender their weapons to local elders and present themselves for registration in Lokot'. All those who failed to present themselves, he promised, would be killed.¹⁵⁰ In response to this order,

¹⁴⁵ Bericht Nr.5 vom 05.04.1942 // BA NS19/1627.

¹⁴⁶ Zakhar Bogatyr', *V tylu vruga* (Moscow, 1963), p. 30; Dmitrii Zhukov and Ivan Kovtun, *29 grenaderskaia diviziia SS 'Kaminskii'* (Moscow, 2009), p. 21.

¹⁴⁷ Aleksandr Diukov, "Die Aktion Kaminski'", in *Mify Velikoi Otechestvennoi*, ed. Grigorii Pernavskii (Moscow, 2008), p. 160.

¹⁴⁸ Khristoforov, 'Kollaboratsionisty', p. 182.

¹⁴⁹ Bogatyr', *V tylu vruga*, p. 39, 54; Zhukov and Kovtun, *29 grenaderskaia*, p. 22.

¹⁵⁰ Kondratii Firsanov, 'Kak kovalas' pobeda', in *Za liniei fronta* (Tula, 1968), p. 78.

some partisans began leaving the forests, bringing their weapons with them and reinforcing the ranks of Voskoboïnik's militia.¹⁵¹ There were examples in which partisans who had surrendered or had been arrested were forced to serve in the police, on pain of being shot if they refused.¹⁵²

The combined staff of the partisan detachments, under the leadership of Saburov, decided to stage a raid on Lokot' and to wipe out the entire top layer of the collaborationist administration in one blow. In the first days of January 1942 partisan scouts made their way into Lokot'. On 6 January it was learnt that on Voskoboïnik's request, German units were to arrive in the town; the 'king of Lokot' was evidently expecting an attack. The partisans seized on this information, deciding to go to the town under the guise of reinforcements. Taking part in the operation were Saburov's detachment, the 'Stalin' detachment from Trubchevsk, the detachments of Pogorelov and Borovik from Kharkov, and Kapralov's detachment 'For the Homeland' from Brasovo.¹⁵³

The partisans travelled on 120 sleds, reaching the town early on the morning of 8 January. They had several goals: to capture the barracks, to seize the regional prison, to seize the house of the mayor and to kill the leaders of the NSPR. Capturing the barracks with a sudden assault proved impossible, and a fierce battle ensued. The partisans attacked several times, but without result; barricading themselves inside, the police cut them off with their fire, despite suffering losses. The prison was seized relatively easily. Meanwhile, police reinforcements had come from Brasovo, and fighting broke out on the outskirts of Lokot'.¹⁵⁴

The results of the operation remain uncertain; in their memoirs, both the Soviet fighters and the defenders of Lokot' embellished their feats. The partisans are supposed to have lost more than 100 of their number. The partisans put the losses of the police at fifty-four, but the most important outcome was that Voskoboïnik was killed in the fighting.¹⁵⁵

Almost immediately after the death of Voskoboïnik, his place was taken by Bronislav Kaminskiï, who set about reordering the police detachments and increasing their numbers. He also sent Hitler a letter in which

¹⁵¹ Ermolov, *Russkoe gosudarstvo v nemetskom tylu*, p. 171.

¹⁵² *Varshavskoe vosstanie 1944 v dokumentakh iz arkhivov spetssluzhzb*, ed. V. Khristoforov et al. (Warsaw, Moscow, 2007), p. 1204.

¹⁵³ Bogatyr', *V tylu vruga*, p. 45; Zhukov, Kovtun, *29 grenaderskaia*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁴ Bogatyr', *V tylu vruga*, p. 46, 47; Zhukov, Kovtun, *29 grenaderskaia*, pp. 39, 40.

¹⁵⁵ Zhukov, Kovtun, *29 grenaderskaia*, p. 45; Bogatyr', *V tylu vruga*, p. 47. The estimate putting the partisan losses at '150 to 250 people' seems exaggerated, since the defenders of Lokot' reported that 'more than 250 partisans' had taken part in the assault, and that some of them had managed to retreat. See: 'On prizyval k vosstanovleniiu natsional'no-trudovogo stroia', in *Golos naroda, Lepel'* (07.01.1944, No.1), p. 3.

he argued that the policies being pursued in the occupied territories were mistaken.¹⁵⁶

In January responsibility for the Lokot' region, along with other territories of the rear, was transferred from the Second Army to the Second Panzer Army. On 26 January a German lieutenant named Glatz submitted the first account of the situation in Lokot'. At that point the number of local police amounted to some 200 people (with a further 270 in four neighbouring villages). Glatz stressed that the new mayor (Kaminskii) was 'an active, militant fellow-soldier, throwing ... all his strength into the fight against the partisans'.¹⁵⁷ Appended to the account were German translations of the proclamation and manifesto of 'Engineer Zemlia'. These drew the attention of an officer of the local department of the Abwehr, who informed his commanders that in Lokot':

a branch of the National-Socialist Party of Russia has been founded on the initiative of the mayor... We request that a decision be taken at the top level as to whether the points contained in the manifesto are acceptable, and whether the manifesto can be distributed ... A reliable informant maintains that publicizing the manifesto is now an especially urgent task ... it also makes sense to disseminate it in the zones of responsibility of other armies.¹⁵⁸

The same document reported on a readiness of the party to expand its program (which leads one to presume that the informant was Kaminskiï himself), and in particular, to add the pledge of 'a total struggle against Jewry'. On 27 March this report, along with others, was forwarded to the *Ostministerium*,¹⁵⁹ but did not evoke any response. Attempts to export National Socialist ideology to the East never aroused any sympathy in Rosenberg,¹⁶⁰ and in any case, the instructions of the OKW stipulated that no nationalist moods were to be encouraged in

¹⁵⁶ Brief Kaminskis an Hitler // BA-MA RH21-2/638. The letter is regarded as having been written by Voskoboinik, and as merely having been signed by Kaminskiï. See: Rolf Michaelis, *Die Brigade Kaminski. Partisanenbekämpfung in Russland, Weißrussland und Warschau* (Berlin, 1999), pp. 56–8; Sebastian Stopper, *Das Brjansker Gebiet unter der Besatzungsherrschaft der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1943. Dissertation*, 2012, p. 106. The letter, however, speaks of more than six months as having elapsed since the beginning of the war, and of changes that would eventuate 'now in the spring'; this suggests it should be dated somewhat later.

¹⁵⁷ Michaelis, *Die Brigade Kaminski*, pp. 60–2.

¹⁵⁸ Bericht Lt. Speyerer (Abwehr-Trupp III/14) an Major v. Tarbuk (OKW/ Abw. Amt Ausland Abw. III) betr. NSDAP Rußlands vom 05.02.1942 // BA-MA RW4/330.

¹⁵⁹ Meldung Nr.II/2251/42 geh vom 27.03.1942 // BA-MA RW4/254.

¹⁶⁰ 'It is wrong and politically inexpedient that any liberation movement of the foreign people would call itself National Socialist.'

See: *Novoe slovo. Berlin* (12.02.1939, No. 7), p. 1.

Russia.¹⁶¹ The commander of the Rear District (*Korück*) of the Second Panzer Army, Major-General von Zanthier, had also stated his apprehension about NSPR:

It is unknown where from they got the guns and against whom these were eventually to be turned. Furthermore, it is unknown if the aims of this party correspond to the aims of the German political leadership. However, the speeches and proclamations of the leaders demonstrate that these people are fanatical, charged with energy and capable of gaining noticeable influence.¹⁶²

While German records from February and March 1942 stressed Kaminskiï's status as the leader of a local National Socialist party, this description subsequently disappeared, and he was named simply as mayor and militia commander.

Kaminskiï thus failed to achieve anything on the political level, but in its military and administrative respects the situation developed more favourably. During the last weeks of February he was first in Orel, where he talked with officers of Section Ic of the Second Panzer Army,¹⁶³ and then in Briansk, where he met with officers of the *Korück* 532,¹⁶⁴ one of whom, Captain von Kryha, began taking an interest in the Lokot' region and visited it several times on inspection trips. For his successes in the struggle against the partisans, Kaminskiï was rewarded in April with a certificate and a radio receiver.¹⁶⁵ By May his unit had grown to 1,500 people.¹⁶⁶ Finally, on 22 July 1942, by order of the commander of the Second Panzer Army, the Lokot' territory was awarded self-governing status.¹⁶⁷

It should be noted, however, that by this time the partisan movement had grown to the point where it had forced the occupiers to station numerous other units in Briansk Province. The 102nd and 108th

¹⁶¹ Direktive WFSt/WPr Nr.457/42 geh vom 27.01.1942 // BA-MA RW4/254. Formally, this instruction was explained on the basis that the nationalists were associated with partisans and Bolshevik agents, but at the same time it was quite consistent with Rosenberg's position that replacing Stalin with a 'nationalist leader' was unacceptable to Germany.

¹⁶² Pz.AOK 2 Ic/AO Nr.53/42 geh vom 11.02.1942 // TsAMO. F. 500. Op. 12454. D. 558. L. 207–211.

¹⁶³ Kriegstagebuch Ic Pz.AOK 2, records from 21 to 23 March 1942 // BA-MA RH21-2/640.

¹⁶⁴ Kriegstagebuch Feldkommandatur 184, record from 25 February 1942 // BA-MA RH23/23. Impressed by Kaminskiï's successes, the command of the rear region soon proposed that a formal distinction be made between the 'law and order service' (*Ordnungsdienst*), that was to remain at the disposal of the local authorities, and the militia (*Miliz*), that was to wage war on the partisans and that was to be subordinate to army units. See: Kriegstagebuch Feldkommandatur 184, record from 8 March 1942 // BA-MA RH23/23.

¹⁶⁵ Kriegstagebuch Korück 532, record from 25 April 1942 // BA-MA RH23/24.

¹⁶⁶ Kriegstagebuch Korück 580, record from 2 May 1942 // BA-MA RH23/174.

¹⁶⁷ Kriegstagebuch Korück 532, record from 22 July 1942 // BA-MA RH23/24.

Hungarian Infantry Divisions,¹⁶⁸ the 'Desna' volunteer regiment,¹⁶⁹ the von Winning cavalry group,¹⁷⁰ the III Battalion of the 638th Infantry Regiment (a French unit),¹⁷¹ the von Gilsa group, and others; the overall number of troops amounted to 50,000.

Under the fanatical anti-communist Kaminskiĭ, who was far more merciless than his predecessor, the struggle reached a new level of mass violence. In October 1942 one German officer reported that while the population retained respect for the late Voskoboĭnik, they hated Kaminskiĭ as well as feared him.¹⁷²

To a considerable degree, the partisan conflict that raged in the occupied territories of the USSR was a form of civil war; as a result, its most characteristic quality was the mutual brutalization of the combatants as well as the civilian population.¹⁷³ One can only agree with the view that:

Soviet society was not only subject to Nazi occupation, but also waged a bloody civil war. Throughout the occupation there was a significantly high level of purely Russian-on-Russian violence, as collaborators and partisans fought with each other entirely out of sight of the Germans.¹⁷⁴

The Cossack Formations

From the point of view of the Germans, Cossacks and the military units formed from among them were some of the most dedicated and effective elements. This can be explained by the fact that many of the personnel

¹⁶⁸ On the actions of the Hungarians, see: Krisztian Ungvary, 'Hungarian Occupation Forces in the Ukraine 1941–1942: The Historiographical Context', in *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (2007, Vol. 20, Issue 1), pp. 81–120.

¹⁶⁹ Sergei Drobiazko, Igor' Ermolov, *Dobrovol'cheskii polk 'Desna' i drugie voennye formirovaniia iz sovetских grazhdan na territorii Orlovskoi oblasti* (Moscow, 2001); Elena Shantseva, 'Ukrainskii dobrovol'cheskii polk na Brianshchine', in *Sotsial'no-gumanitarnye issledovaniia v BGTU*, ed. A. Stepanishchev (Bryansk, 2009), pp. 133–46.

¹⁷⁰ In February 1942 partisans succeeded briefly in occupying the town of Trubchevsk, 100 km south of Bryansk. In March the von Winning cavalry sub-unit (*Reiterverband v. Winning*) was sent to maintain order in the town. See: Kriegstagebuch Feldkommandatur 184 Brjansk, record from 20 March 1942 // BA-MA RH23/23. In June the Trubchevsk Volunteer Battalion was established on the basis of the sub-unit. See: Aufstellung Bataillone Trubtschewsk und Lokot vom 25.06.1942 in Anlagen zum Kriegstagebuch Korück 532 // BA-MA RH23/26.

¹⁷¹ Oleg Beida, *Frantsuzskii legion na sluzhbe Gitleru* (Moscow, 2013), pp. 151–7.

¹⁷² Dallin, *Brigada Kaminskogo*, p. 44.

¹⁷³ On the military experience of the Soviet partisans, see: Masha Tserovich, "'Ia vizhu krovavoe more, v kotorom plavaiut korabli, postroennye iz chelovecheskikh koster'", in *Malen'kii chelovek i bol'shaia voina v istorii Rossii* (Saint Petersburg, 2014), pp. 512–29.

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas Terry, 'How Soviet was Russian Society under Nazi Occupation?', in *Rethinking History, Dictatorship and War: New Approaches and Interpretations*, ed. Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (London, 2009), p. 143.

involved were more motivated than other collaborators; as early as the years of the Civil War the Soviet authorities had pursued a policy of 'de-Cossackization', extending to the partial extermination and forced resettlement of the Cossack population from the provinces in southern Russia and the Caucasus where they had traditionally lived. In the case of the Cossacks, the schism of the 1920s, reinforced by the subsequent catastrophes of collectivization and 'de-kulakization', grew broader following the beginning of the war with the foreign enemy.

Cossack veterans of the Civil War who were living as émigrés in Europe greeted the news of the war on the USSR with elation. The former ataman of the Great Host of the Don General Petr Krasnov wrote on 22 June: 'I wish to state to all Cossacks that this war is not against Russia, but against communists, Jews and their minions who trade in Russian blood.'¹⁷⁵ On 28 June General Mikhail Grabbe issued an order summoning the Don Cossacks to a new 'crusade'.¹⁷⁶ The ataman of the All-Cossack Union in the German Reich, Lieutenant-General Evgenii Balabin, was also delighted by events.¹⁷⁷ Despite the contradictions within the Cossack emigration and the constant frictions, all these and other individuals were later to participate actively in establishing the Cossack formations of the Wehrmacht.

It is difficult to say precisely when the first Cossack units appeared. Presumably, 'unofficial' formations already existed in late September and early October 1941; by 27 October there was already a Cossack 'hundred' (*sotnia*) in the 221st Security Division.¹⁷⁸ Receiving permission to set up the Cossack units was much simpler than in the case of other units made up of war prisoners; these latter units long retained their 'unofficial' status. By agreement with the top leaders of the SS and the police, Quartermaster-General Eduard Wagner on 6 October granted permission to the commanders of the rear in the three army groups (North, Centre and South) to each create a Cossack hundred (*Kosaken-Hundertschaft*) to fight against the partisans.¹⁷⁹ After Wagner had given his permission, the reality quickly outstripped the bounds of what had been allowed. On 1 November, in association with

¹⁷⁵ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF). F. P-6461. Op. 2. D. 34. L. 73.

¹⁷⁶ GARF. F. P-9145. Op. 1. D. 1250. L. 138.

¹⁷⁷ GARF. F. P-5853. Op. 1. D. 69. L. 384.

¹⁷⁸ Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg: Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42* (Munich, 2009), p. 624.

¹⁷⁹ OKH, betr. Versuchsweise Aufstellung von Kosakenhundertschaften zur Partisanenbekämpfung, Nr.II/6878/41 g. Gen.St.d.H./Gen.Qu. Az.Abt.K.Verw (Qu), 06.10.1941 // IfZ MA 488/2; Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen 1941–1943*, p. 21. In much the same way (in full compliance with Rosenberg's ideas), companies made up of Ukrainian and Belorussian POWs were provided. See: Der Befh. des rückw. HG Mitte Ia. Korpsbefehl Nr.61 vom 12.10.1941 // IfZ MA 855.

Feldgendarmarie-Abteilung 581, a Cossack detachment was formed consisting of a staff and 300 men.¹⁸⁰ In the course of the war other German units also accepted Cossacks into their ranks; for example, 650 Cossacks later served in the *Reiterverband Boeselager*.¹⁸¹

Even before Wagner gave permission to form small anti-partisan formations, first 'official' formation came at the behest of a captured Cossack officer not the Germans themselves. After being surrounded on 20 August 1941, the commander of the 436th Rifle Regiment of the 155th Rifle Division, Major Ivan Kononov, crossed over to the Germans 'with two officers and a sergeant from his regiment'.¹⁸² During his first interrogations he declared that as a Don Cossack he was an ardent foe of Bolshevism, which had destroyed Cossackdom, and on the whole made a magnificent impression on the German officers.¹⁸³ Together with another deserter, Captain Nagelmann, Kononov provided extensive information on the structure of the military and political leadership of the Red Army.¹⁸⁴ Kononov and Nagelmann addressed a proposal to the commander of the rear of Army Group Centre, General Max von Schenkendorff, that they form a unit made up of prisoners of war under their command, since they 'had a fierce hatred of the present regime'¹⁸⁵ and hoped to use their experience of the Russian question in the struggle against Bolshevism'.¹⁸⁶ As a result, such a sub-unit was established

¹⁸⁰ Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Band 11: Die Landstreitkräfte 501–630* (Osnabrück, 1975), p. 222.

¹⁸¹ Bodo Scheurig, *Henning von Tresckow. Eine Biographie* (Oldenburg, 1973), p. 136; François de Lannoy, 'Les Cosaques au service du Reich', in *39/45 Magazine* (1997, No. 130), p. 22.

¹⁸² Vernehmung des russischen Majors Kononov vom 27.08.1941 // NARA. T-315. R. 206. Post-war sources sometimes state that Kononov crossed over to the German side with a battalion or even an entire regiment. See: Konstantin Cherkassov, *General Kononov. Tom 1* (Melbourne, 1963), p. 123. The original German documents merely speak of three companions of Kononov. See also the interrogation of 23 August 1941 in: Kirill Aleksandrov, Oleg Nuzhdin, 'Novye dokumenty k biografii general-majora I. N. Kononova', in *Russkoe proshloe* (Kn. 12, 2012), p. 264.

¹⁸³ Interrogation report from 23 August 1941, in: 'Novye dokumenty k biografii', pp. 262–4; Interrogation report from 27 August 1941 // NARA. T-315. R. 206; Interrogation report from 6 September 1941 // NARA. T-501. R. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Verhör der Offiziere (Überläufer) ... Kononov und ... Nagelmann vom 06.09.1941 // NARA. T-501. R. 2.

See also their joint 'Organisational scheme of the political organs of the Red Army' from 17 September 1941, in RGVA. F. 1387. Op. 1. D. 104. L. 99.

¹⁸⁵ During the interrogation both admitted that they had been in the Communist Party, but stated that numerous members of their families had perished during the Civil War and the Stalinist purges. See: Verhör der Offiziere (Überläufer) ... Kononov und ... Nagelmann vom 06.09.1941 // NARA. T-501. R. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Kurt von Kraewel, 'General v. Schenkendorff' // IFZ ZS 257.



Figure 14.1 On 13 October 1941, ninety-four Jews were shot in Miropol. The photographer, Skrovina Lubomir, testified in 1958 that the action was performed by local Ukrainian militia. The Ukrainian (blue/yellow) coloured armband is seen on the foremost perpetrator's left arm.

under the supervision of the officers of the rear region Ia and Ic Major von Kraewel and Lieutenant Rittberg.¹⁸⁷

From September onwards Kononov recruited people from POW camps in Vitebsk, Mogilev, Orsha, Gomel, Smolensk, Bobruisk and others.¹⁸⁸ He told prisoners of the German successes, which he substantially exaggerated, then called on them to join his squad, promising food rations and uniforms equal to those of the Germans, and at the end of the war, land allotments and financial subsidies. With these promises, and the impossible conditions in which prisoners were held in the camps, recruitment proceeded at a lively pace, and a selection was made of men fit for service. On 12 October von Schenkendorff ordered the creation

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; Aleksandrov, *Ofitserskii korpus...* (2009), p. 493.

¹⁸⁸ 'I had met Kononov in captivity in the camp in Bobruisk at the end of September. He was dressed in the uniform of a German major and was registering men for the Cossack regiment he was forming.'

Letter of M. Samygin to *Novy i zhurnal* from 21.06.1949 // HIA, Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 258, Folder 15.

of the first Cossack hundred,¹⁸⁹ after which the Cossack Squadron 102 (*Kosakenschwadron 102*), comprising of some 200 sabres under the command of Kononov, was formed in Mogilev toward the end of October.

The OKW distributed the records of Kononov and Nagelmann's¹⁹⁰ initial interrogation to other army groups. Inspired by the example of their success and by now also by Wagner's permission, the leadership of Army Group North wanted to establish a Cossack squadron in their rear area, but this idea encountered an unexpected obstacle – no captured Cossacks were found in the *Stalags* and *Dulags* of this army group.¹⁹¹

Kononov's biographer suggests the very first action of the new formation was a resounding success¹⁹², though German sources make no mention of this operation.¹⁹³ From February 1942 Kononov's Cossack squadron took part in a merciless anti-partisan war. By August 1942 his command was upgraded to East Cossack Battalion 102 (*Ost Kosakenbataillon 102*), and in March 1943 the unit was expanded into East Don Cossack Detachment 600 (*Ost Donkosakenabteilung 600*).

In the occupied territories, spontaneous Cossack formations arose. In October and November 1941 the Germans were approaching the former Cossack territories of Rostov Province. A number of *khutory* (hamlets) and *stanitsy* (Cossack villages) were occupied, and here the local commanders urged that atamans be elected and that churches be reopened. This was done, and with permission from the Germans, the Cossacks began gathering weapons that lay scattered about the fields, as well as clearing mine-fields and burying the dead. The weapons and

¹⁸⁹ Der Befh. des rückw. HG Mitte Ia. Korpsbefehl Nr.61 vom 12.10.1941 // IfZ MA 855.

¹⁹⁰ The subsequent fate of Captain Nagel'man is unknown. In the interrogations he described himself as Estonian, but from his surname and patronym (Iakovlevich), he may well have been assumed to be Jewish.

¹⁹¹ Tätigkeitsbericht der Abteilung Ic, record from 4 November 1941 // NARA. T-501. R. 3. Nevertheless, at the beginning of 1942, a Cossack hundred was created. In Kononov's squadron too, of course, the membership of the recruited prisoners of war in the Cossack communities was often debatable, or a ruse designed to allow the existing bans on the use of Soviet war prisoners to be circumvented.

¹⁹² Presumably, on 26 October information was received from deserters that as many as a thousand Soviet parachute troops had landed in the vicinity of the village of Shepelevichi. On 27 October the Cossack unit went into action, and by the evening of 28 October the Soviet detachment had been crushed in the region of the villages of Shepelevichi, Mortianovich and Glubokoe. The Cossacks lost twenty-nine dead and sixty-three wounded, while the partisans suffered 171 killed, 348 wounded and 257 captured. On the morning of 29 October the Cossacks withdrew to Mogilev, and on 30 October buried their dead. A number of Soviet prisoners from the defeated detachment crossed over to the 'Kononovtsy' // Cherkassov, *General Kononov*, p. 135–138. The book has the character of an apologetic, so its contents need to be regarded with caution.

¹⁹³ Major von Kraewel merely indicates that 'after two months of instruction the subsection was sent into action for the first time with German units in the struggle against the partisans, yielding good results'. See: Kraewel, 'General v. Schenkendorff'.

ammunition were brought to the *stanitsy* and kept under guard. Armed Cossack squads, and later much larger formations thus arose on their own.¹⁹⁴

In October, in the *stanitsa* of Siniavskaia, the Cossacks overthrew the local Soviet authorities, seized their weapons and then departed. When the Germans later approached, they were greeted as liberators, and were requested to allow the formation of an anti-Soviet detachment. The Germans granted this request, and gave the Cossacks captured Soviet weapons and horses. Cossacks from adjacent *stanitsy* and *khutory* joined the detachment; the new recruits were typically youths and older men, since those of military age had all been drafted into the Red Army. Later, the Cossacks withdrew to Taganrog. To lead the new formation, the Germans sent their own officer, Senior Lieutenant Baron von Falkenhausen. Germans were also appointed to command the squads and sections. This produced discontent among the Cossacks, but the new commander managed to reach an agreement with them, and the formation was reorganized; the old Cossacks were assigned to transport duties, while the younger ones were trained according to the German system, received new uniforms and were given weapons. In this way, the 9. *Kosaken-Schwadron des Radfahrer-Regiments 4* was established.¹⁹⁵

In mid-October 1941 units of the XIV Panzer Corps encountered an 'independent' Cossack formation. Reaching the River Mius, they found to their astonishment that units of the Ninth Soviet Army were already waging a battle behind the Soviet lines. Supposing that a surrounded German unit was trying to break out of encirclement, the XIV Corps hurriedly attacked. It turned out that the battle was being fought by a Cossack unit that had attacked the Red Army soldiers from the rear. It was commanded by the Don Cossack Nikolai Nazarenko, a former serviceman in the Romanian army who had earlier been sent into the USSR on a sabotage mission. After being discovered, he was sent to a camp, from which he escaped. For an extended period he concealed himself from the authorities; then, with the outbreak of war, he forged his documents and settled in Taganrog. As the Germans approached the city, he used his forged documents to obtain the rank of senior lieutenant, and managed to gain the command of a group of Cossack militia who were sent to support Soviet forces. The company was holding positions near

¹⁹⁴ Viktor Dudnikov, 'Daleko ot rodnikh stanits', in *Dvorianskoe Sobranie* (1997, No. 7), p. 140.

¹⁹⁵ Cherkassov, *General Kononov*, pp. 39–41, 45, 46; Sergei Drobiazko, 'Kazaki v vermakhte 1941–1945', in *Na kazach'em postu* (2004/2005, No. 5–6), p. 10; Peter Schuster, Harald Tiede, *Die Uniformen und Abzeichen der Kosaken in der Deutschen Wehrmacht* (Norderstedt, 1999), p. 17.

the Mius River, and as the German units approached, tried to break through to them. Nazarenko's Cossacks had light infantry weapons and five artillery pieces. The Germans had no idea what to do with such unexpected 'allies', and sent Nazarenko and his eighty men to the staff headquarters. Nazarenko was received by the commander of the XIV Corps, General Gustav von Wietersheim, who listened sympathetically to his story. The Cossacks were attached to the corps as a reconnaissance battalion, and were given German uniforms on which they wore a white patch with the black letter 'K' ('Kosaken'). On 23 October 1941 Nazarenko's battalion accompanied the corps to Rostov, and shortly afterward was transferred to the 1st Panzer Army.¹⁹⁶

In November or December 1941 the Dubrovskii Battalion was also established within Army Group South, under the command of a Don Cossack. This unit was later expanded into the 'Platov' Regiment.

On 15 April 1942 Hitler gave permission for Cossacks to be used in battle, both against partisans and at the front.¹⁹⁷ The latter provision was completely atypical; the Germans as a rule did not trust units of Eastern origin, and sought to employ them in the fight against partisans in the rear. The formation of Cossack units on a large scale began in 1942. Some of them also participated in war crimes; for example, in August 1942 one of the units of the 'Major Fürst von Urach' Cossack regiment, which was under the authority of the 1st Panzer Army, took part in the shooting of Jews.¹⁹⁸ There were undoubtedly other instances as well.¹⁹⁹

By April 1943 more than twenty Cossack regiments, each of them numbering from 400 to 1,000 men, were fighting on the side of the Wehrmacht, in addition to a large number of smaller units – in all, as many as 25,000 officers and men. The personnel consisted almost exclusively of prisoners of war who had been captured by the Germans between May and July 1942. Approximately half were not Cossacks, but claimed to be simply in order to get out of the appalling POW camps. The other half were indeed Cossacks, many of whom had fought against the Red Army during the Civil War or who had suffered repression since. They had strong reason to seek revenge, and were thus more reliable for the Germans.²⁰⁰ Other Cossack formations, many of which had been

¹⁹⁶ Samuel J. Newland, *Cossacks in the German Army 1941–1945* (London, 1991), pp. 89–92.

¹⁹⁷ Hoffmann, *Kaukasien* 1942/43, p. 356.

¹⁹⁸ Manfred Oldenburg, *Ideologie und Militärisches Kalkül. Die Besatzungspolitik der Wehrmacht in der Sowjetunion 1942* (Köln, 2004), p. 306.

¹⁹⁹ See: Peter Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg? Kriegführung und Partisanenbekämpfung in Frankreich 1943/44* (Munich, 2007), p. 407.

²⁰⁰ Sergei Drobiazko, 'Kazach'i chasti v sostave vermakhta', in *Materialy po istorii Russkogo osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia. Vyp. 1* (Moscow, 1997), p. 192.

established in the autumn of 1942, were later transferred to France along with other Eastern battalions.²⁰¹

Ukrainian Nationalists

The collaboration by Ukrainians (in the first instance, Ukrainian nationalists) with the occupation authorities represents one of the most complex and contradictory episodes of the Second World War. As was noted earlier, Ukraine played a special role in the plans of the new minister for the occupied eastern territories. Rosenberg wrote in his diary:

To make enemies of 120 million [people] through necessarily harsh treatment applied equally to all, or through dividing them up and applying differentiated treatment, to make half of them our allies later on ... if the Reich needs food-stuffs from these countries, this needs to be regulated through the use of special norms: requisitioning more in areas where the people are not considered allies, and less where they are considered to be such.²⁰²

Within this scheme, the inhabitants of Ukraine were designated as allies. Soviet Ukraine had suffered terribly during the years of collectivization (especially during the famine of 1932–3) and of the ‘Great Terror’,²⁰³ and this had instilled in the population an enduring antipathy to the Soviet authorities. Historically, meanwhile, the territory on which the Ukrainians lived had been divided for centuries between various countries: first between Russia and Poland, then between Russia and Austro-Hungary, and later, following the perturbations of the Civil War and a brief period of independence, between the USSR and Poland.

Unification took place only after Western Ukraine was annexed to the USSR in September 1939 under a secret protocol to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Historically, the most active part of the population in nationalist terms lived in Western Ukraine, above all in Galicia. It was logical that in September 1939 the leaders of nationalist movements should have preferred to remain in emigration; the local activists were

²⁰¹ Guy Lalanne, Georges Bernage, ‘Osttruppen’, in *39/45 Magazine* (1985, No. 8), pp. 3–27; Alain Chazette, ‘Les unités cosaques en France et la Freiwilligen-Stamm-Division de Lyon’, in *39/45 Magazine* (2000, No. 166), pp. 9–19; Paul Gaujac, ‘Les volontaires de l’Est en France, 1944–1945’, in *Armes Militaria Magazine* (2002, No. 209), pp. 30–6.

²⁰² *Alfred Rosenberg. Die Tagebücher*, p. 393.

²⁰³ Whether the worst of this terror was aimed deliberately at Ukraine is a point of contention. See, for example: Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010), pp. 21–118; Jürgen Zarusky, ‘Timothy Snyders “Bloodlands”’. Kritische Anmerkungen zur Konstruktion einer Geschichtslandschaft’, in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (2012, No. 60), pp. 1–31.



Figure 14.2 Ukrainian auxiliary police (presumably summer 1942).

subject to persecution from the Soviet security organs, using measures that included deportation and the firing squad.

Outstanding among the movements concerned was the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (*Organizatsiia Ukrainskikh Natsionalistiv* – OUN), an ultra-right organization that arose in the late 1920s and that called for an independent Ukrainian state in which the Ukrainian population would have priority rights compared to other nationalities (‘Ukraine for the Ukrainians’).²⁰⁴

When the Nazis in 1939 were preparing for the attack on Poland, one of the variants considered involved a plan to use the OUN to stage a revolt in Galicia aimed at wiping out Poles and Jews.²⁰⁵ In 1940 a split took place in the OUN. From the more moderate wing (subsequently, the OUN-M led by Andreï Mel’nik), the more radical OUN-B split off under the leadership of Stepan Bandera. Not long before,

²⁰⁴ Franziska Bruder, ‘Den ukrainischen Staat erkämpfen oder sterben!’ *Die Organisation Ukrainischer Nationalisten 1929–1948* (Berlin, 2007); Frank Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer, 1918–1939* (Paderborn, 2010), pp. 547ff.

²⁰⁵ Aktenvermerk von Vizeadmiral Canaris über die Besprechung mit Hitler, Keitel, Jodl und Ribbentrop am 12.9.1939 in *Das Amt Ausland/Abwehr im Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, ed. Norbert Müller et al. (Koblenz, 2007), pp. 129–30.

Bandera had been the organizer of terrorist acts (the OUN permitted terror as a method of struggle) on the territory of Poland, in particular the murder in 1934 of the Polish Interior Minister Bronisław Pieracki.²⁰⁶

Both wings of the OUN collaborated with the Nazis, while feuding openly with one another. Prior to the war with the USSR the Abwehr put its stake on the OUN-B, forming two battalions, *Nachtigall* and *Roland*, on the basis of its members. The battalions were given tasks of military sabotage, including the arresting and eliminating of Soviet commissars and officers, and also auxiliary administrative tasks, that is, setting up local organs for maintaining law and order, defending the German rear, and serving as guides and translators.²⁰⁷

In practice, the OUN-B sent onto Soviet territory not just these two battalions in German uniform, but also the so-called *pokhidni grupi* ('marching groups'), whose instructions were of a far broader nature: 'In times of chaos and confusion, we may allow ourselves to liquidate undesirable Poles, Muscovites and Jews, especially supporters of Bolshevik-Muscovite imperialism.'²⁰⁸

When German forces on the morning of 30 June 1941 took the capital of Galicia, L'vov, without a battle, the *Nachtigall* Battalion was among the first units to enter the city.²⁰⁹ It was followed by leaders of the OUN-B, in particular, Mikola Lebed' and Iaroslav Stets'ko; Stepan Bandera, however, was banned by the Nazis from leaving the territory of the General Government.²¹⁰ In the local prisons, an appalling discovery awaited the soldiers – several thousand corpses of former prisoners, among them many Ukrainian nationalists, who had been shot by the NKVD shortly before it abandoned the city.²¹¹ The killings were not strictly speaking excesses, since they accorded with the brutal practice

²⁰⁶ Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera*, pp. 117–67.

²⁰⁷ See for example: Information der Abwehrstelle Rumänien zu einer Anweisung der Abteilung II des Amtes Ausland/Abwehr über die im Falle eines Krieges mit der UdSSR für die Gruppen Melnik und Bandera der OUN vorgesehenen Sabotage- und Diversionaufgaben vom 12.6.1941 in *Das Amt Ausland/Abwehr*, p. 217–218.

²⁰⁸ Viys'kovi instruktsii z Instruktsiy Revoliutsiynogo Provodu OUN (S.Banderi) dlya organizatsiynogo aktivu v Ukraïni na period viyni "Borot'ba y diyal'nist' OUN pid chas viyni". Traven' 1941 r. in *OUN v 1941 rotsi: Dokumenty, ch. 1*, ed. O. Veselova et al. (Kiev, 2006), p. 93. The OUN-M had its own 'marching groups'.

²⁰⁹ Kai Struve, *Deutsche Herrschaft, ukrainischer Nationalismus, antijüdische Gewalt: Der Sommer 1941 in der Westukraine* (Berlin, 2015), p. 253.

²¹⁰ Struve, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 262–70; Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera*, p. 198.

²¹¹ Recent estimates put the number of victims at between 2,800 and 4,000 people. See: Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera*, p. 204; see also NKVD documents with lists of those shot: http://avr.org.ua/index.php/ROZDILY_RES?idUpCat=347.

whenever prisons in the western provinces of the USSR were evacuated in the summer of 1941.²¹²

These events had tragic consequences. On instructions from the Nazis and from their own leaders, the members of the OUN-B organized a militia from among their local cadres. It was this militia that played the key role in the anti-Jewish pogrom that began towards midday, and that activists sought to justify as 'revenge' for the detainees who had been killed in the prisons.²¹³ Also taking part in the pogrom were Ukrainian soldiers from the *Nachtigall* battalion.²¹⁴

The role of the OUN-B in organizing the pogrom is dismissed or understated by various modern Ukrainian historians.²¹⁵ Veterans of the *Nachtigall* Battalion either failed to mention the pogrom in their memoirs,²¹⁶ or denied the events outright.²¹⁷ Only one of the veterans of the battalion wrote directly about the shooting of Jews; in this case, however, the killings were not in L'viv but in Vinnitsa Province.²¹⁸

A study of the surviving documents of OUN-B from 1941 reveals an absolutely clear anti-semitic thrust.²¹⁹ Testimonies from eyewitnesses, both Jews and Ukrainians, also stress the role of the nationalists in organizing the pogrom.²²⁰ In just the same way, there are German depositions

²¹² On the evacuation of prisons in other provinces of Ukraine and Belarus, see: 'Evakuatsiya zakliuchennykh iz tiurem NKVD SSSR v 1941–1942 godakh', in *Voenna-istoricheskii arkhiv* (Vyp. 2, 1997), pp. 238–53.

²¹³ For an account of the events in L'viv, see: Hannes Heer, 'Einübung in den Holocaust: Lemberg Juni/Juli 1941', in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (2001, No. 5), p. 409–427; John-Paul Himka, 'The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd', in *Canadian Slavonic Papers* (2011, No. 2–4), pp. 209–43; Struve, *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 247–431.

²¹⁴ In 1960 the prosecutor's office in Bonn recognized that a certain part, at least, of the 2nd Company of the *Nachtigall* Battalion took part in the pogrom. Recent data provide grounds for doubting that the criminals were limited only to the 2nd Company. See: Heer, 'Einübung in den Holocaust', p. 424.

²¹⁵ See, for example: Volodimir V'yatrovich, *Stavlennya OUN do evreiv* (L'viv, 2006), pp. 50–70.

²¹⁶ *U lavakh druzhinnikiv*, ed. Miroslav Kal'ba (Denver, 1982), pp. 28, 64–5, 80–2, 114.

²¹⁷ Miroslav Kal'ba, *Nakhtigal' v zapitannyakh i vidpovidyakh* (L'viv, 2008), pp. 22, 23; Miroslav Kal'ba, *'Nakhtigal' u sviitli faktiv i dokumentiv* (Denver, CO, 1984), pp. 68–111.

²¹⁸ Ivan Patrilyak, *Legioni ukrains'kikh natsionalistiv* (Kiev, 1999), p. 26.

²¹⁹ Aleksei Bakanov, *'Ni katsapa, ni zhida, ni liakha'* (Moscow, 2014), pp. 176–227; Karel C. Berkhof and Marco Carynnyk, 'The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and Its Attitude toward Germans and Jews: Iaroslav Stets'ko's 1941 Zhyttiepys', in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, (1999, No. 3), pp. 149–84; Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich, 1997), pp. 56–65.

²²⁰ Eliyahu Yones, *Die Strasse nach Lemberg: Zwangsarbeit und Widerstand in Ostgalizien 1941–1945* (Frankfurt, 1999), p. 18; Roman Volchuk, *Spomini z peredvoennogo L'vova ta voennogo Vidnya* (Kiev, 2011), p. 82–4.

concerning the participation by troops of the *Nachtigall* battalion.²²¹ One of these testimonies stated:

On orders from the Germans, the Ukrainian soldiers drew themselves up in two ranks and fixed their bayonets. All the Jews who had been in the prison yard were made to pass between these ranks, while the Ukrainian soldiers beat and stabbed them. By pure chance, I was not among the first who had to pass along the ranks. The first Jews who had to go through were almost all bayoneted.²²²

The L'vov Judenrat estimated the number of victims of the pogrom and first executions as 2,000 people.²²³ Pogroms analogous to the one in L'vov took place in other cities of western Ukraine. On 1 and 2 July *Einsatzkommandos* 5 and 6 and z.b.V (*zur besonderen Verwendung*: for special use), which were part of *Einsatzgruppe* C, arrived in L'vov, and the murder of Jews began taking on a systematic and organized character.²²⁴

At a special assembly on the evening of 30 June, Iaroslav Stets'ko read out an Act according to which the OUN, 'under the leadership of Stepan Bandera', proclaimed:

the founding of the Ukrainian State, for which whole generations of the best sons of Ukraine laid down their lives ... The newly established Ukrainian State will collaborate closely with National Socialist Greater-Germany, which under the direction of its leader Adolf Hitler is creating a new order in Europe and the world, and is helping the Ukrainian people to free itself from Moscow's occupation.²²⁵

This initiative had not been agreed upon either with Berlin or even with the local command of the Wehrmacht, although several officers were invited to the ceremony. The OUN-B wanted to confront the Nazi leadership with an established fact, hoping that events would develop in a way similar to that in Croatia, where following the occupation of Yugoslavia a puppet 'independent' state had been proclaimed.

The result turned out to be the complete opposite. The spontaneous action aroused doubt in the Nazis that the OUN-B was a force on which they could rely in Ukraine. Stets'ko and Bandera were arrested. After a few days Bandera was summoned before the Deputy Secretary of State

²²¹ Thomas Sandkühler, 'Endlösung' in Galizien. Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz 1941–1944 (Bonn, 1996), p. 488.

²²² Heer, 'Einübung in den Holocaust', p. 421.

²²³ Himka, *The Lviv Pogrom*, p. 221; an overview of other estimations in Struve *Deutsche Herrschaft*, pp. 376–9.

²²⁴ Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung*, pp. 67–74.

²²⁵ On the publication of the Act, see: *Samostiynna Ukraïna. Stanislaviv* (10.07.1941, No. 3), p. 1; *Zboriv's'ki visti. Zboriv* (30.07.1941, No. 1), p. 1. It is noteworthy that the Act was still published several weeks after the arrest of Bandera and Stets'ko, with the local activists of the OUN taking advantage of the slow and clumsy German censorship.

of the General Government Ernst Kundt, who declared bluntly that only Adolf Hitler was entitled to make decisions concerning the future of Ukraine.²²⁶ In the newspapers of the OUN-M the 'Act of Proclamation' was described as 'imaginary'; rumours concerning it were said to have been put about 'in order to agitate the Ukrainian population'.²²⁷

In July and August Hitler did, indeed, take political decisions that effectively annulled all Rosenberg's plans for the creation in a future *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* of a regime that would be more favourable than that on the occupied territory of Russia. Galicia was separated from Ukraine and placed under the General Government (Bandera and Stets'ko, who were under house arrest, protested in vain),²²⁸ while the southwest of Ukraine (Transnistria) was transferred to Romanian administration. Contrary to Rosenberg's wishes,²²⁹ the Gauleiter of East Prussia, Erich Koch, was appointed as Ukraine's *Reichskommissar*. Koch considered it indispensable to administer Ukraine with maximum harshness, and to squeeze out of it everything possible (in 1942 the sending of *Ostarbeiters* to Germany was added to the requisitioning of foodstuffs).²³⁰

In Zhitomir on 30 August 1941 two prominent figures in the OUN-M, Senik and Sciborski, were shot in the street by unknown gunmen. The German investigators suspected the OUN-B of 'eliminating competitors'.²³¹ On 13 September Reinhard Heydrich ordered that measures be taken against the Bandera group.²³² Bandera himself was transferred to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, while rank-and-file activists of the OUN-B began to be arrested and shot.²³³

In August 1941 the *Nachtigall* and *Roland* Battalions were withdrawn in order to be reorganized in Germany. Those of their members who

²²⁶ Niederschrift über die Rücksprache mit Mitgliedern des ukrainischen Nationalkomitees und Stepan Bandera vom 03.07.1941 in *Ukraina i Nimechchina u drugi svitoviy viyni*. T. 1, ed. Volodimir Kosik (Parizh, New York, L'viv, 1993), pp. 105–27. The rank of the official who took responsibility for deciding the question is worth noting.

²²⁷ See, for example: 'Do vidoma gromadyanstva', in *Nastup. Praga* (19.07.1941, No. 30), p. 3.

²²⁸ See letters of Stets'ko and Bandera to Hitler from 3 August 1941: *Ukraina i Nimechchina u drugi svitoviy viyni*, T. 1, pp. 236–42.

²²⁹ On a conference with Hitler on 16 July 1941, see: Aktenvermerk vom 16.7.1941 (Document 221-L, IMT, Vol. XXXVIII); *Alfred Rosenberg. Die Tagebücher*, p. 393–9; for Rosenberg's own opinion, see: *ibid.*, pp. 412–14.

²³⁰ For Koch's attitude to Ukraine, see the record of his speech from 5 March 1943: TSDAVO. F. 3676. Op. 1. D. 26b. L. 202.

²³¹ Historians today share this view. See: Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera*, pp. 242–3.

²³² Schnellbrief Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD vom 13.9.1941: Maßnahmen gegen die Bandera-Gruppe in *Deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft in der UdSSR 1941–1945. Dokumente der Einsatzgruppen in der Sowjetunion, Band II* ed. Andrej Angrick et al. (Darmstadt, 2013), pp. 143–6.

²³³ Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera*, pp. 250–1.

wished to continue serving in the German army were combined into the *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 201*, which in 1942 was used for anti-partisan operations on the territory of Belarus.²³⁴

Following after the German forces, the ‘marching groups’ of the OUN also moved eastward. In eastern Ukraine the OUN-M achieved more influence than its competitors from the OUN-B. Kiev provides a telling example: by November 1941 the OUN-M controlled the city administration and the main Kiev newspaper *Ukrains’ke Slovo* (‘Ukrainian Word’), which alternated praise for the ‘German allies’ with nationalist slogans (‘If for the German, Germany is above everything, then for the Ukrainian, Ukraine is above everything.’)²³⁵

In addition, various cooperative and industrial enterprises finished up under the management of the nationalists. According to eyewitnesses, the ‘Ukrainization’ of Kiev had not so much a threatening as an odd character. Imitating the German signs *Nur für Deutsche* (‘Only for Germans’), for example, the Ukrainians in the cinemas and even the trams posted signs reading *Tilki dlia ukrainsiv* (‘Only for Ukrainians’). Soon, however,

the impression ... began to form that somewhere in the west (in L’vov?) there was a sort of staff headquarters that controlled everything and that was assigning its people. The aim of this headquarters was political: establishing a Ukrainian republic, that is, implementing the principle ... ‘the state before everything’. In their practice they embraced the method of presenting the Germans with a *fait accompli*. They took over the management of pharmacies, then observed how the Germans reacted. If the latter were half-hearted about driving them out, they remained, but if there was determined opposition, they did not argue and did not resist.²³⁶

Meanwhile, antagonism arose between local activists and new arrivals from western Ukraine (the former were not so aggressively nationalist). At the same time, corruption corroded the already besmirched national idea:

Everyone speculated, and they speculated in everything: in sugar, in lard, in influence within the administration, in contacts with the Germans, in newspaper articles and so forth. I would not go so far as to state that the [national] idea became dissolved in corruption, but at any rate, the idea ceased to be visible, while the stench of corruption ‘hit you in the nose’.²³⁷

²³⁴ Aleksandr Gogun, *Mezhdu Gitlerom i Staliny* (Kiev, 2014), p. 55.

²³⁵ Ivan Koshik, ‘V ednosti – sila narodu’, in *Ukrains’ke slovo*. Kiev (31.10.1941, No.45), p. 1.

²³⁶ Letter of N. Marchenko to B. Nikolaevskii from 18.10.1950 // HIA, Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 493, Folder 16.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

Compared to the radical OUN-B, the OUN-M at first seemed to the Nazis to be a lesser evil, but the OUN-M also put forward independent ideological concepts that the Germans eventually decided were unacceptable. Presumably, denunciations by local residents of the nationalists, who were prepared to collaborate unquestioningly with the Germans without insisting on any political conditions, also played a role.²³⁸ In December 1941 nationalists in the Kiev city administration and the editorial staff of the newspaper *Ukrains'ke Slovo* were arrested and, in most cases, soon liquidated. The central organ of the new administration was the newspaper *Nove Ukrains'ke Slovo* (New Ukrainian Word),²³⁹ edited by Kiev University Professor Konstantin Shtepa, a Gestapo informer.²⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, Shtepa adopted an absolutely loyal position with relation to the occupation authorities, even endorsing their racist views: 'After reading Rosenberg's book ... Professor Shtepa noted that Ukrainians did not possess the "supreme value"; they were inferior, and needed to be educated by the Germans.'²⁴¹

The collaboration between Ukrainian nationalists and the occupation authorities had its peculiarities, such as the 'special' position which the Nazis proclaimed with relation to Ukrainians, and also the ramified structure of the OUN in emigration and at the local level, a structure that allowed it, through exploiting the 'vacuum of power', to hold leading posts in the occupied territories. Nevertheless, this collaboration fitted into an overall pattern: the Nazis used the nationalists to carry out local military and administrative tasks. Meanwhile, attempts at independent political or ideological activity were suppressed, at times in extremely savage fashion.

²³⁸ See, for example, an interrogation protocol of L. Dudin: '...the newspaper's line was harmful to Germany... [The editor] avoided printing speeches by German state figures.' A. Panfilov, *Za kulisami 'Radio Svoboda'* (Moscow, 1974), p. 115.

²³⁹ A letter of 16 December 1941 from the General Commissar of Kiev to the head of the garrison General Eberhardt contains this passage: 'The earlier newspaper *Ukrains'ke Slovo* followed a national-extremist policy trend, and the German civilian authorities have thus relieved it of the duties with which it was entrusted. This means that national extremism will vanish from the newspaper, and it will begin celebrating the greatness and supremacy of the German Reich in appropriate fashion.' Derzhavnii arkhiv Kiivskoï oblasti. F. P-2353. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 71. Cited on microfilm in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

²⁴⁰ TSDAVO. F. 3676. Op. 4. D. 310. L. 2. It is curious to note that under the Soviet regime he was an informer for the NKVD. On Shtepa, see: I. Verba, Kost' Shtepa in *Ukrains'kii istorichnyi zhurnal* (1999, No. 3), pp. 97–111, (1999, No. 4), pp. 98–114.

²⁴¹ TSDAVO. F. 3206. Op. 5. D. 4. L. 249–250. The book referred to is *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*.

Zuev's Autonomous Region

The rapid occupation of Belarus in the summer of 1941 led to the rise of a peculiar territorial formation that later became known as 'Zuev's republic', or the 'republic of Old Believers'. No historian known to the authors has as yet made a systematic study of this little-known topic.

By the end of August the Germans had occupied all of Belarus. Gomel' fell on 19 August, and on 22 August Mozyr' was captured.²⁴² Polotsk had been occupied on 15 July, and soon afterward the population of the small village of Zaskorki (Saskorki), located 20 km south-west of the city, elected a new mayor, Mikhail Zuev. Zaskorki was situated amid bogs, away from roads, and hence the Germans did not go there. The region had a population composed solidly of *starovery* ('Old Believers'), adherents of an age-old and very strict branch of Orthodox Christianity. For obvious reasons, the zealous believers hated the Soviet authorities.²⁴³ Zuev himself had served three prison sentences for his opposition to collectivization, and shortly before the war had returned from a camp. Two of his sons had been arrested by the NKVD and sent to Siberia. Among the local residents he had a reputation as an educated man, knowledgeable in old religious books. After the election he travelled to Polotsk and officially registered his status as mayor.²⁴⁴

For the village deep in the forests of Belarus, a relatively peaceful peasant life then began. The collective farms were dissolved, and the land was divided on the basis of how many mouths each family had to feed. Families in which there were children were given a cow each. All domestic poultry was transferred to private use, while the remaining cows and horses were considered common property.²⁴⁵

In the autumn of 1941 seven people came to Zaskorki armed with rifles, declaring that they were partisans and that the village was obliged to support and maintain them. Among these people was one of the NKVD agents who previously had worked in Polotsk. Zuev laid a table for the 'guests' in one of the houses, and went to consult with his neighbours. At

²⁴² Leonid Rein, *The Kings and The Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (New York, 2013), p. 80.

²⁴³ Old Believers were employed for the creation of collaborationist formations in Lithuania in the spring of 1943. See: 'Vozzvanie k russkim staroobryadtsam v Litve', in *Pribaltika pod znakom svastiki*, p. 244.

²⁴⁴ Vladimir Pozdniakov, Dmitrii Karov, "'Respublika" Zueva', in *Novyi zhurnal* (1952, No. 29), p. 197.

²⁴⁵ Vladimir Volzhanin (Pozdniakov), 'Zuyev's Republic' [1951] // NA RG 338. Historical Division European Command. Foreign Military Studies Branch. MS #P-124. P. 28. We thank Dr Jeff Rutherford (USA) for his kind help with this source.

this discussion it was decided to kill the partisans and hide the weapons. This was done.²⁴⁶

Soon, a further group of armed people came to the village and also demanded food. The partisans were fed, but Zuev asked them to leave the village. Next day they returned, and now demanded home-distilled alcohol. Zuev forced out the peasants with the recently acquired rifles. The partisans returned in large numbers during the night, but Zuev had posted guards and after an exchange of gunfire fled back into the forest.²⁴⁷

The partisan movement in the first months of the war was still in a nascent form. Their numbers were small, and their actions had not yet taken on a centralized character; the squads themselves often consisted of Soviet soldiers who had broken out of German encirclement. Their demands annoyed the peasants, who complained to the Germans, but the latter were typically indifferent. In Zaskorki and two neighbouring villages Zuev began forming self-defence squads. Rifles were given to the best marksmen, and hunting weapons were also used. Guards were posted at night, and when an alarm was sounded, they moved quickly to the necessary point and repelled the attack. By the end of 1941 fifteen clashes had occurred with partisans; in the course of these, 'Zuev's men' had lost five of their number. Knowledge of the locality lent them an advantage; during one of the battles Zuev and his nephew followed a narrow path through the bog, and laid an ambush. As the partisans retreated, the two Old Believers shot more than eight of them.²⁴⁸

In December the store of ammunition came to an end, and Zuev travelled to Polotsk to seek help from the commandant. The latter heard Zuev out, and asked for a week to seek instructions from the higher command. On parting, Zuev received a few cartridges, but they were German and did not suit the Russian rifles.²⁴⁹ A week later Zuev again arrived in Polotsk, where he was presented to the general commanding the army rear (*Koriück*). In the surviving manuscripts devoted to Zuev's autonomous region, the name of the general and the number of the *Koriück* are missing. Zuev himself said he had forgotten the name. But a Russian émigré and Abwehr officer, Dmitrii Karov, made a handwritten note in his text to the effect that the head of the *Koriück*, Lieutenant-General Gullmann, later dealt directly with Zuev. We may thus presume that

²⁴⁶ Dmitrii Karov, '“Respublika” Zujeva', in HIA, Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 280, Folder 8. P. 12, 13, 23.

²⁴⁷ Volzhanin, 'Zuyev's Republic', p. 16.

²⁴⁸ Karov, '“Respublika” Zujeva', p. 14.

²⁴⁹ Pozdniakov, Karov, '“Respublika” Zueva', p. 198.

in December 1941 Zuev met with the previous head of *Korück* 582,²⁵⁰ Lieutenant-General Oskar Schellbach. The latter was familiar with Russian matters, and said that he knew the *starovery* were bitter enemies of the Soviet regime. Schellbach promised to supply Zuev with rifles, but said he was doing it in violation of the rules. A few days later the *starovery* received 50 Soviet rifles and a sufficient supply of ammunition. At the same time, Zuev was warned that he did not have the right to say where he had obtained the weapons.²⁵¹

The squads began to be armed. Neighbouring villages sent negotiators, and asked to be put under the squads' defence, to which Zuev agreed, and his sphere of influence widened. Early in 1942 he conducted a raid on distant villages, drove the partisans out and 'annexed' the villages to his territory. A number of partisans deserted to Zuev and promised to serve him. By the spring of 1942 the armaments of the squads included four Russian machine-guns.²⁵²

Within the squads, discipline was maintained with the help of violence. For minor delinquencies the offenders were savagely whipped and imprisoned in a cellar where they were given only bread and water. In the case of major infractions, the offenders were shot by Zuev personally. Throughout the whole period he shot two Old Believers for desertion under fire, but he took even less pity on non-Old Believers, and shot ten of them.²⁵³ The command post in Polotsk was favoured from the beginning with regular supplies of firewood, hay, milk and game.

Zuev called his domain a 'republic'. Within the self-governing territory a highly individual system of power took shape. In each of the villages that joined the 'republic' (by the autumn of 1942 there were three regions) Zuev had a deputy who answered directly to him. In each village, a council of elders was also established; this conducted investigations and judged those found guilty of small misdemeanours. Private property was restored, and trade was carried on. Particular stress was placed on religious life; weddings, baptisms and funerals were conducted according to the rites of the Old Believers, and were recorded in huge books in the Old Slavonic language. Priests enjoyed immense prestige, and Zuev built opulent prayer houses. Each of the villages paid Zuev a 'tax' (in tsarist gold rubles, furs, honey and leather), from which he

²⁵⁰ See also: Theo Schulte, 'Korück 582', in *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941–1944*, ed. Hannes Heer, Klaus Naumann (New York, Oxford, 2004), pp. 314–25.

²⁵¹ Karov, '“Respublika” Zujeva', pp. 14, 15; Volzhanin, 'Zuyev's Republic', p. 18.

²⁵² Pozdniakov and Karov, '“Respublika” Zueva', pp. 198, 199.

²⁵³ Karov, '“Respublika” Zueva', p. 15.

created a fund that was used to bribe the Germans, pay for medicines and purchase weapons.²⁵⁴

As many as 300 people, including women, joined the armed squads; of these, 100 were permanently on a combat footing. The squads were led by junior officers who had served in the RKKA and by veterans of the Civil War. These 100 people were divided into groups of ten and lived partly in Zuev's village and partly in the other villages. They did not work, but occupied themselves solely with guard duties. The remaining 200 were on first call. Weapons were kept at home, and each of the fighters bore personal responsibility for them. If a major operation was anticipated, Zuev assembled the whole force, and each person brought a supply of food for two days. 'Zuev's men' guarded their territory themselves, and saw to the sowing of crops. The areas between the villages were patrolled by groups of five or six people, who detained anyone they did not know. Zuev constantly sent his people into neighbouring regions to gain information on what was happening round about. Apart from this, 'Zuev's men' never left the district.²⁵⁵

Later, the strong-willed Zuev came into conflict not only with the Soviet partisans, but also with German punitive detachments and with the new commandant in Polotsk (presumably, this was Colonel von Nikisch). The 'Republic of Old Believers' survived until the summer of 1944, when its chief led about a thousand of his people into East Prussia.

Conclusion

With the attack by the Nazis in 1941 all the pre-war fractures in Soviet society were laid bare, along with all the accumulated discontent with the regime. This provided a broad basis for collaboration with a force that viewed this cooperation as a necessary phenomenon, but which in essence did not want it, even if there were exceptions at the middle and even top levels (for example, in the Ninth Army).

The initial form of collaboration was seen at the front, where it took the shape of creating formations made up of prisoners of war and of putting them to work. At this first stage command duties fell to White émigrés from Europe. It is hard to draw any conclusion as to the degree of ideological 'consciousness' or 'unconsciousness' of many of the Soviet participants in these first formations. Individual segments

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24; Dmitrii Karov, *Partizanskoe dvizhenie v SSSR v 1941–1945 gg.* (Munich, 1954), p. 82.

²⁵⁵ Pavel Il'inskiĭ, 'Tri goda pod nemetskoĭ okkupatsiei v Belorussii', in *Grani* (1956, No. 30), pp. 115, 116; Karov, "«Respublika» Zujeva", p. 24.

of Soviet society which the Communist regime had 'singled out' in a negative sense (for example, the Cossacks) had more reasons initially for collaboration with the Nazis. Meanwhile the unbearable conditions under which POWs were held, as one of the most important factors setting people on the road to collaboration, presents a special problem for defining motivation.

At the same time, we have the paradoxical fact that it was precisely in imprisonment that attempts emerged at political collaboration with the Nazis and at party-building (as with the RTNP). This was something which the Nazis believed early on that they had no need of. The Germans viewed such attempts merely as tools, and had no interest in either the goals or the declarations of collaborators, even where both the goals and the people were loyal and did not contradict the basic postulates of Nazism. In essence, organizations such as the RTNP were viewed as means of 'secondary control', to be used for narrowly specialized purposes such as selecting and sifting through masses of POWs, with a view to the subsequent elimination of 'hostile elements'.

In some areas of the rear, a diverse and chaotic process unfolded at almost the same time, involving the spontaneous seizure of power and attempts at separation from the invading Germans. Characteristic of this 'ferment in the rear' were several main elements: the dividing-up and distribution of collectivized farmland; the restoration of private property; the creation of armed forces from among local inhabitants, and attempts at building quasi-states through founding movements and parties and through issuing declarations.

A particularly striking example appeared in Orel Province, where an extraordinary situation arose: *de facto*, though not *de jure*, a semi-autonomous formation with modest armed forces existed on a relatively large territory for some four to five months. Of its own accord, and to the extent it could, this formation ensured the Wehrmacht a peaceful rear while the German forces drove onward toward the gates of Moscow. A similar semi-autonomous formation, this time based on religious values, was established near Polotsk, in more peaceful circumstances. In themselves, these examples merely indicate how little is known to this day about the social and military processes that occurred in the rear of the advancing German army, and how little control this army had over the situation, despite the ruthlessness that as early as the autumn of 1941 had come to be applied in dealing with the processes in these rear areas.

Meanwhile all the collaborationist forces, despite the various distinct paths they declared for themselves, supported the German occupation in word and deed. This was despite the fact that for the

Germans they were no more than tools, including for the purpose of implementing a policy of extermination. Though very slowly, this position of the Germans nevertheless changed, and with time they gave permission for the establishing of more and more formations of this type, while simultaneously (from the winter of 1941–2) seizing the initiative and beginning to exercise increasing control over their rear and the processes underway there. Despite this, the Germans looked with disfavour on the building of parties and political movements, and deliberately ‘fed’ the collaborators with declarations and promises. At the same time, conscious of the taboo nature of such projects, they promised the collaborators nothing at all and concentrated simply on using them for military ends. The Wehrmacht could not pass up the military side of the question, however much it might have wished to do so.

In summing up the Germans’ occupation policy during 1941, it is scarcely possible to derive any ‘single’ total. It can be said confidently that this policy embodied both uniform features (for example, the Nazis imposed it with the same harshness in all the occupied eastern territories), and diverse ones, differing from region to region. Moreover, it needs to be remembered that within a year, in 1942, the Nazis would occupy new territories (the Caucasus) with a different population, and that collaboration there would take on a different colouration.

On the whole, however, the Nazis by the end of 1941 had alienated a population that initially had shown a cautiously neutral attitude toward them, and elements of which had been quite positively inclined.²⁵⁶ Making use of anti-Bolsheviks of all stripes and nationalities only in a narrowly utilitarian fashion, that is, for establishing military formations under maximum German control, the Nazis, without realizing it, wasted the genuine anti-Soviet potential that was present in the social make-up of the USSR. A little later, if not simultaneously, they reinforced the net effect with harsh occupation policies, driving away substantial numbers of the people who had believed the propaganda of Goebbels’ ministry (‘the war is not against Russians, but against Bolsheviks’), and who had been prepared to march with

²⁵⁶ The soldier of the 129th Infantry Division Helmut Pabst mentioned that the people his unit encountered in October 1941 were friendly, see: Helmut Pabst, *Der Ruf der äussersten Grenze: Tagebuch eines Frontsoldaten* (Tübingen, 1953), pp. 44–6. General Gotthard Heinrich wrote to his family on 19 November 1941: ‘We can only get these partisans with the help of the Russian people living here. They usually give them up happily, because they themselves are terrorized and robbed of their food by these brigands, etc.’ *Ein deutscher General an der Ostfront. Die Briefe und Tagebücher des Gotthard Heinrich 1941/4*, ed. Johannes Hürter (Erfurt, 2001), p. 111.

the Germans against the Soviet regime. Losing the trust and loyalty of the citizens of the occupied territories, the Wehrmacht thus robbed itself of one of its real chances of winning the war. With racist arrogance, haughtiness, cruelty and repellent crimes, together with colonial ambitions and appetites, the Nazis squandered anti-Soviet moods and civil disagreements.

Meanwhile, it was perhaps these moods of Soviet citizens that constituted the 'Russian key' to the Kremlin gates toward which the Wehrmacht was straining so eagerly in 1941.

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